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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“UNCLE, IF I HAVE TO DO THIS—YOU MUST TELL ME THE REASON,” SHE SAID, HER CHEEKS WHITE AS DEATH.]

PASSION AND PLAY.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

Homburg, the queen of watering-places, had decked herself in beauty for the reception of half the world.

The Kürsaal, with its lovely gardens, tempted those who were worn in body and mind to drink new life with its sparkling goblets of mineral water.

The Kürsaal, with its brilliantly lighted saloons, asked all who were weary of pleasure and tainted with the murky waters of dissipation to come and find refreshment for the jaded spirit, excitement for the tired nerves, in the fever of unsatisfied longing, the wild rush of glad expectation, and the turmoil of passionate hope, as hearts that are bursting with passion and pain, with the thirst and the hunger for gold, totter between ecstasy and despair, and the delirious strains of the band play them further and further down the road

to ruin; and those who look on with wonder, are drawn as by witchcraft into the spell, and forgetting all in the craze of the infectious madness, stake their last farthing, their honour in this world, their hopes in the next, on the cast of a die!

Every degrading passion comes forth to the front, and principles are left outside with the umbrellas.

The sun shone, the band played, the roses bloomed, the very air seemed to laugh with the exuberance of life, and humanity in all its phases of the lower depths of its deformity, or the glowing heights of its perfection, passed on in a continual procession under the lime-leaves—youth and beauty, folly and frailty, age and senility, following each other as the days flew past; whilst the laughter of the frivolous rang in sunshine or gaslights, hearts were breaking, souls were sinking, and rose-leaves fell on the corpse of the suicide, and the waltz of the season played his requiem.

It was a feverish unhealthy world into which Blanche was thrown the first night of her arrival.

After the seclusion of Sandilands the clatter of foreign tongues and the continual throngs of people bewildered her.

She wanted to get away from the rustle of silks and laces, the glare, the clatter, and the laughter, and go into some quiet spot and breathe.

She looked across at Frank, wondering what he thought of it all. His thoughtful face was very pale, and his eyes seemed unnaturally large, but that was all.

He had the same tranquil smile as ever, and kept his own individuality in the centre of the noisy crowd, as if he were in the study at home.

“You were so long in coming that I nearly rushed back to England to see if you had given me the slip,” said Captain St. Aubyn, his deep voice sunk almost to a whisper, as he placed himself at Blanche’s side in the crowded saal. The rooms were brilliantly lighted, and an eager mob had gathered round the tables.

Sir Charles had slipped into an empty chair, and was fumbling in his pocket for some napoleons.

Augusta was talking to a certain Count

Grossi, whose black eyes were fixed in ardent admiration on her glowing beauty.

Satisfied vanity gave a sparkle to her glance, and her red lips parted in the brightest of smiles.

She was evidently too much engrossed with her own flirtation to notice any one else, and St. Aubyn felt free to enjoy himself.

Frank Verreker, utterly worn out, had retired to bed like a sensible man, and Lady Lushington's back was turned as she discussed the last fashionable ailment with an ancient dowager.

"Mr. Verreker was ill, and I was obliged to wait for him."

"Happy Verreker!"

"Do you think it happiness to fall down a chalk-pit?" she asked, scornfully, as she looked round for her aunt.

"I should think it happiness to be picked up by you."

"And suppose I did not pick him up, but his sister?"

"And suppose you nursed him when he got home? I can imagine the charming idyll as if I had been there myself. The peaceful parsonage amongst the cornfields, the youthful consumptive parson reclining on the sofa, with Hebe by his side, her hands full of roses, her eyes full—"

"Frank is not consumptive and I did my best to be useful, instead of posing as a flower girl day after day. If you knew how bad he was you wouldn't envy him."

"Shouldn't I? I would have an ache in every bone of my body to be nursed by a goddess."

"If there were a goddess in the question, I should think it very certain if I ached at all."

"I should aches on purpose to enjoy her compassion."

"Tell me something of the people here. It is all so new to me. I feel quite bewildered. Who is that pretty girl spoilt by the rouge?"

"The false, false, false-to-life Fifine, lots of the Gaeté," he said, with a cynical smile; "now she has lost her gaiety, and established a reputation. Her character was found somewhere washed up on the French coast, and pinned on her back by old Carré of the Blues. To show her gratitude, she lets him pay her bills, and pays him back with more scroffs than him."

"Horrid creature! Why does he do it?"

"Because he can't help it. Women are like syrenes. It is easy to get into their hands, but hard to get out."

"That depends upon the women."

"Certainly. I know one angel and many fiends."

"Why do you know them?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is good to stand well with the majority."

"I won't listen to you. You insult my sex."

"Take a look round, and judge for yourself. You will see human nature with the mask off. There is not much time to think of appearances when passions are worked to fever heat, and the demon of play has got hold of them. Look at that pretty woman with the careworn face," pointing out a lady, tall, refined, and very pale, except for a patch of hectic colour on her cheeks. Her eyes were fixed in a glittering stare on the crupier's stolid face, and one thin hand was outstretched towards a small pile of gold. "She was born for better things, but she can no more keep away from the tables than a drunkard from the bottle. She has left her husband and children at Wiesbaden, and come here with a friend to drink the waters. It is easy to see her end. She will not go back till she has lost her last napoleon, and then—she will die broken-hearted."

"Why does her husband let her?" asked Blanche, with a shiver.

"Because he is a fool, and trusts her." He paused for a minute, then nodded his head towards a woman who had a baby face and dove-like eyes, fluffy tow-coloured flop silk by way of hair, and a smile of angelic innocence. With her pretty plump hand she laid down a

bank-note, and looked laughing up into the face of a bearded warrior in the uniform of the Prussian Imperial Guard. "Do you admire her?"

"Yes. She is quite refreshing. Like an oasis of innocence in a desert of vice."

"L'innocence même," he said, with a mocking gleam in his eyes. "She ran away with Charlie Skipton the day he was twenty-one, turned his pockets inside out, and left him when they were empty. He was foolish enough to blow out his brains—as if the women were worth it. Out of gratitude she ordered a tombstone, and married the Count de Trémolines, just in time for him to have the advantage of paying the bill."

"He looks more like a German than a Frenchman."

"Oh, that's her fourth. Trémolines went to the dogs, and finally to the churchyard, where he was thankful to find a hole where his wife couldn't follow him. She is the cleverest woman I know, for she always contrives to get rid of one husband when she has fixed her fancies on another, and escapes the Divorce Court by a succession of funeral processions."

"Don't tell me anything more. You make me ashamed of being a woman at all."

He looked down into her disgusted face with an indefinable smile.

"I am only educating you in the ways of the world. Come and try for yourself. When you have staked your first napoleon you will forget everything in the excitement."

"I have no napoleons to throw away."

"Let us break together," he said, eagerly. "I feel sure you would bring me luck."

She drew up her neck with quiet dignity.

"Bohème are against my principles."

"That doesn't matter; principles never come inside these doors. Players like to play unshackled; and all such useless fettering, doubts, scruples, and prejudices are left outside under the trees."

"Let us go there. Their company would be more edifying than anything we find here."

"By all means. A tête-à-tête under the trees, instead of suffocation under the gas-lamps. Come!"

"Not really. I must wait for my aunt. Where is she?"

"Deeply engrossed in a catalogue of her own miseries the most absorbing theme she knows. She is safe not to meet you till she comes to her next attack in the spring."

"No, it won't do. I wish my uncle would not play," she added, nervously, as she caught sight of his face flushed with excitement, and watched how his hand shook as he took out a worn leather purse.

"It was the turf in his youth, now it is the tables. Don't grudge it him; he is never so happy as when he is gambling. Try it for yourself. You will never understand it till you do."

"Not for the world. Why do you wish it, when you know all about its horrors?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because I should like to bring you down from the clouds, and a little nearer to my own level. Listen, and I will tell you what should happen if I could tempt you. You should take to it so hotly that you shouldn't be able to tear yourself away till you had lost your last farthing. You should be afraid of telling your aunt or uncle for fear of their reproaches, and it should be for me to find you with dishevelled hair, and your face all wet with tears, on some bench in the garden; and perhaps you would be a trifle less haughty for the future if I had saved you in secret, unknown to the world. Will it ever be?" looking down into her eyes with a longing that was almost fierce.

"Never," she said, proudly, as a blush stole over her face. "Surely I am under a sufficient amount of obligation already. More would crush me."

"That is what I want. Every feather-weight added to it brings you nearer to me."

"Be content, we are near enough for friends."

"Friendship is as water—it never stains. I would—Ah! Sir Charles, had any luck to-night?" he asked, with a sudden change of voice and manner, as the baronet came up to them.

"Not bad," he said, tapping his purse with a smile. "I see you are not going in for it to-night. Are you inclined for some quiet écarté, by-and-bye?"

"Delighted. Shall I come to you in half an hour?"

"About that. Well, Blanche, what do you think of all this? Looks pretty cheerful, doesn't it?"

"Yes, uncle; nothing could be brighter than the gaiety or the gilding, and nothing sadder than some of the faces."

"Ah, you are right. People never know when to stop," he said, with more wisdom in his words than his practice. "Where is Augusta?"

"Here, papa, trying to reform Count Grossi. He says the wickedest things with the most unblushing effrontery, and I've been trying to convince him of his errors without success."

"Ah, mademoiselle, as long as you pardon with such infinite grace you will always tempt me to err," said the count, with a smile. "I shall sin and sin again, because it is so novel to be forgiven."

"Forgiveness may be worn out," with a flashing glance in the direction of St. Aubyn, whose eyes were fixed on a Russian prince on the opposite side of the room.

"Not so long as women have hearts, and men have the courage to win them," murmured Felice Grossi in an undertone.

CHAPTER V.

A SOCIETY PICNIC.

At seven o'clock a.m. the band struck up the solemn tune of the Morning Hymn; and one by one sleepy-eyed mortals began their daily pilgrimage to the health-giving wells.

Gradually the mass of two or three developed into a crowd, and the first burst of gossip was discussed over glasses of milky water. Frank Verreker was there, looking very white and thin in his long black coat, surrounded as he was by innumerable suits of dittos.

He had stayed at Homburg for the sake of his health. The gate in his chest was not cured, and his nights were often disturbed by a hacking cough; and yet to-day he had made up his mind to go away.

He felt sick at heart as he walked up and down under the covered way, amongst the chattering mob. It seemed to him as if the laughter which he heard on every side had a false ring in it, and as if the mirth were a mockery.

"Perhaps I'm out of tune myself," he mused, as after drinking his second tumbler with a grimace of disgust, he strolled into the palm-house to while away the time before the nine-o'clock breakfast, which was supposed to be an important part of the regimen.

He looked at the beautiful specimens of tropical foliage with an absent glance, which saw nothing but an oval face with its frame of chestnut curls, its passionate eyes of blue.

"She is throwing herself away upon the worthless fellow, and I can't stay her. What is the use of my mauling on here where nobody wants me?" he pondered, ruefully, as he threw himself down on an ornamental seat with a sigh. "I had far better be down at Sandilands, drumming the Catechism into wooden heads and reading to old women."

"Oh! here you are! We have been looking for you everywhere," said the voice he loved best, and Blanche Neville stood before him, bright and bewitching as a newly-blown rose, leaning on her uncle's arm. "We have come to carry you off for a picnic on the river. 'No' won't be listened to, so you needn't try it."

"I am not thinking of it," and every cloud vanished from his face. "I shall be only too pleased to come. What time do you start?"

"Somewhere about twelve. The lazy people won't be up before then!"

"You had better come and breakfast with us to-day," said Sir Charles, with whom the young rector was a special favourite. "I am thirsting for some sensible conversation after the eternal sling of the gaming rooms."

Frank, nothing loth, consented, and the trio strolled back to the hotel, stopping every now and then to answer a hearty greeting, or chat with a pleasant acquaintance.

During the last fortnight, Captain St. Aubyn's conduct had puzzled Blanche to such a degree that she honestly did not know which he preferred—*Augusta* or herself.

After devoting himself to Miss Lushington all the day, he would desert her in the evening; and only get up from the gaming-table if he caught sight of Blanche's face amongst the crowd. When he spoke to her he lowered his voice to a tenderer key, and his eyes looked at her so strangely, that her cheeks were often dyed with blushes. But at other times, he seemed to avoid her rather than not, though persistently watching her every movement at a distance.

Indignant at being treated like a plaything, dropped one day, picked up the next, she resolved to bring him to his senses by a constant treatment of the cold shoulder.

The opportunity offered as the picnic party were taking their places in a number of boats, which were provided for the occasion.

"You must trust yourself to me for once, Miss Neville," said St. Aubyn, who had only just appeared, pulled the last boat closer to the bank.

"Excuse me, I trust myself to no one but my cousin," and giving her hand to Frank she stepped over the side, and took her place at the stern.

He turned away with a scowl.

"For God's sake don't offend the man," whispered Sir Charles in her ear. "Let me call him back, and say you were only joking."

"Not for the world. What does it matter?"

"More than you know of, I see," with a sigh of relief, "he is in the same boat with *Augusta*. She will bring him round if anyone can."

The so-called object of the picnic was to visit an island at some little distance, which was famous as being the place of sepulture of a mythical king.

After half-an-hour's row, it was reached, without adventure, and the cloth was laid on the grass by the fair hands of the ladies, whilst the men were employed in uncorking bottles, and endeavouring to make mysterious "cups" without the necessary ingredients.

The servants' help had been discarded, for it was thought that their presence would have been undesirable on the narrow precincts of the island.

There was a tomb in the centre with a curious kind of grotto by the side, which they intended to explore, but it was agreed to wait till after luncheon. *Augusta* was in the highest spirits, with St. Aubyn on one side and Count Grossi on the other, and her low ringing laugh was often heard amongst the clatter of knives and forks.

"Flirtation is the salt of life," she said, with a merry smile, as she placed a grape between her lips. "Everything is insipid without it."

"If it isn't the sugar," put in the Count.

"I think it is more than either!" cried St. Aubyn, as he tipped off a glass of champagne; "it is to me the very air I breathe. I could not live without it!"

"After such a speech as that," said Sir Charles, looking up across from the opposite side, "if I were a woman, I wouldn't trust you!"

"Then I'm very glad you are not, lest you should spread incredulity amongst the sex."

"But, St. Aubyn, you convict yourself," said Lord Halifax, eagerly. Having only arrived from England the night before, he was naturally anxious not to be put into the shade.

"The next time you make love to a woman in earnest she won't believe you, because you have dubbed yourself a flirt."

"But is a man ever in earnest?" with an arch glance for the general benefit.

"No, Miss Lushington, nor a woman either."

"St. Aubyn, you are wrong there," cried Sir Charles. "Women pretend to play with us, but they break their hearts, poor things, if they make a mistake in the game."

"As their hearts are always in pawn it makes no difference to the owners," with a cynical smile.

"Captain St. Aubyn may speak from his own experience," said Frank Verreker, his face flushing, "but I am happy to say my own has been amongst women of a different type."

"Ah! I dare say," with an air of insolent superiority. "I never made a study of the cottagers."

"When I was staying at Sandilands a few weeks ago, I found that there were plenty of people for Mr. Verreker to study besides the rustics."

"If you come forward, Miss Neville as Verreker's champion, I lay down my arms at once."

"Pray take them up again, Frank can defend himself without my help."

"Nobody attacked him that I know of," said *Augusta*.

"He is a bold man that would do it in Miss Neville's presence," muttered St. Aubyn in an audible whisper.

"Yes, I always stand up for my friends. Please remember that the next time anyone slanders me."

"Perhaps I may, with a different result."

"Hush! child; we are all friends here," said Sir Charles, in a low voice, laying his hand on her arm, as the others rose simultaneously.

"He has no right to treat my cousin as if he weren't quite as good as himself," she returned, with flashing eyes. "The first Verreker came in with the Conqueror."

"He may have helped Alfred to burn his cakes, for all I know," with a good-humoured smile, "but that is no reason why you should take up the cudgels for his descendant, especially when he isn't attacked. St. Aubyn will die of jealousy."

"I don't care."

"Try to like him better, there's a good girl."

"But why, uncle? What is it to you?"

"Everything," was the emphatic answer.

"Come into the grotto, Miss Neville," said Lord Halifax, coming up at that moment. "We are all going."

Lady Lushington for once forgot her shattered health, and peered into the vault with as much eagerness as any of the rest. There was nothing to be seen in the interior, except the curious coloured mosses which hung on its damp walls, and sundry inscriptions which everyone studied with the deepest interest. Wild guesses were given as to their meaning. Verreker was the only one who made out the word "Kaisery" with a big K in close juxtaposition.

"Didn't somebody say Charlemagne was buried here?" exclaimed the little Viscount, as the luminous idea flashed through his brain that K might stand for Karl.

"Somebody will say anything," said Sir Charles impatiently. "It's the dampest hole I ever was in. Let us get out."

"On the hottest day in summer the temperature is only one degree above freezing point," remarked St. Aubyn.

"I can well believe it," and *Augusta* shivered. "Let us fly, or we shall never be able to flirt again. Now I know why the Esquimaux regard their wives as movable bits of furniture, to be exchanged at will."

"Why, what has the cold to do with it?"

"Everything. How could passion exist in such an atmosphere?"

When they emerged once more into the daylight the sunshine had disappeared, and dark clouds gathered over head which threatened to come down in a heavy shower.

"Let us get home as fast as we can, or we

shall be storm-bound," said Sir Charles, leading his wife into one of the boats. The others followed without delay; but they had got "no further than half way between the island and the town, when the clouds came down in peltin rain. No one had got an umbrella, except an old lady who never moved without one, and Lady Lushington took refuge under her wing. The men gallantly took off their coats, and placed them at the disposal of the ladies. Blanche protested vehemently when Frank wrapped his round her shoulders, but nothing would induce him to take it back.

"I am ever so much stronger than you," she said, in real distress, but unable to resist effectually for fear of upsetting the boat.

"Perhaps your life is more precious than mine," he answered, with a smile; but she shook her head in vigorous denial.

The sun came out in the most provoking manner as soon as they had landed, and the banks of the river, which had been shrouded by a mist, stood out once more in all the glory of their many-tinted foliage, whilst the vines looked like purple shadows in the distance.

Such draggled-looking objects were rarely seen before, as the ladies appeared in their drenched muslins. Utterly ashamed of themselves, they slunk into the hotel, looking like whipped hounds with their tails between their legs, whilst Verreker went off to his lodgings, carrying his wet coat over his arm, and coughing like an asthmatic old man.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONFESSION.

"BLANCHE, where are you? I want to speak to you," said Sir Charles, a few days later. Lady Lushington was lying down with a headache, and *Augusta* was spending the evening with some friends to discuss the best costume to be worn at a fancy ball. Blanche threw down the book which she had been reading to her aunt, and with a quaking heart followed her uncle into a small sitting-room on the opposite side of the corridor.

He sat down by the table, as if he were very tired, and she placed herself on a low stool close beside him. "What is it, uncle?"

"Something that it is very hard to say," he said, hesitatingly. "It isn't easy for an old fellow like myself to ask a favour of a girl like you."

"Not when you have been father, uncle, everything to her?" with quick reproach.

"Even then it's hard; for you've repaid me a thousand times," and he laid his hand caressingly on her bright hair. "Why are you so uncivil to St. Aubyn? He saved your life, they tell me, down at your old home."

"He has saved my life more than once," she said, with flushing cheeks; "and I have promised to be his friend."

"A queer sort of friend, I think; but I want you to be one in earnest. No matter what that man asks of you, I want you to do it," and he brought his hand down on the table with sudden emphasis. "And that for the sake of your poor old uncle."

"But uncle!" in great dismay.

"No bats, if you love me," he said, irritably. "When I tell you that if that man's crossed I am ruined, I hope I have said enough. Why child, any other girl would be flattered by his attentions, and think herself as happy as a queen if he asked her to be his wife."

"Fortunately, he is devoted to *Augusta*, not me."

"Stuff and nonsense, I know better. The fellow's in love with you, and you must know it yourself."

"You don't want me to marry him!" The roses went up and down on her breast, and her voice faltered.

"Why not? I should have thought you might do it for your own sake—if not for mine," and an unusual expression of sternness settled down upon his features. "I think if I let him have you, he might be satisfied." Neither spoke, whilst he rapped the table with

a paper knife, as a relief to the irritation of his feelings.

"Uncle, if I have to do this—you *must* tell me the reason," and rising from her stool, she stood up before him, her cheeks white as death, her hands clasped.

"I should have to go back to a time long before you were born," he said, with a sigh. "George St. Aubyn, this fellow's uncle, and your poor father, were my greatest friends. Your mother was the sweetest creature that ever breathed, and we were all in love with her. I was mad to win her, and staked my last farthing on a certain horse, which for many months was first favourite for the Derby, in the hope of winning a fortune. I thought the thing as sure as fate, and was quite happy till just a month before the race, when I heard that the odds were in favour of Forest King, a horse belonging to St. Aubyn, and which he had purposely kept very dark."

He stopped; before his mind's eye rose a picture out of the past which brought beads of perspiration to his forehead at the bare remembrance of it. He saw a stable at Epsom, a creeping form slide through an open window, and a man standing in the darkness with a shut lantern in his hand. That man was himself; the creeping form that of Bill Jones the tout, whom he had bribed by a heavy fee to do this dirty work; and who yet refused to do it unless his principal was there, to be implicated as well as himself in case of discovery.

The poisonous pill was administered to Forest King whilst the groom who was left in charge slept the sleep of the intoxicated, and the tout came back to Lushington with a broad grin: "I've done it, and he's took it like a lamb."

"Then take that, you d—d scoundrel," roared George St. Aubyn, as he felled the man with one blow, and flashed his lantern in the face of his accomplice. He started back in horror at seeing his friend, and Charles Lushington tumbled back against the wall.

Thinking of it now, after forty years of remorse, the flush of shame flooded his forehead, and leaning his elbows on the table he buried his face in his hands.

After an interval of several minutes, he said, huskily, "To cut a long story short, Forest King was taken ill on the morning of the Derby, and it was I who doctored him. St. Aubyn found me out, and has held the secret as a sword of Damocles over my head ever since. He promised not to publish it to the world on two conditions, first, that I should give up my pretensions to Blanche Verreker's hand, which was like a sentence of death to me; secondly, that I should do what I could to favour his interests under all circumstances, or the interests of that member of his family to whom he should reveal the secret before he died. Do you see the meanness of this man through all his pretended generosity? He was not content with punishing me then and there, in the very depths of my heart; but he meant me never to be free from the fear that my shame would come out—meant me always to live in the dread that I should suddenly be branded as a felon. George St. Aubyn is on his death-bed, dying by inches of some internal disease; and Stuart is his heir. There child, I have told you," and wiping his forehead, he pushed away his chair as a sign that the interview was over.

As she saw what the confession had cost him, a great wave of tenderness swept over the girl's tender heart. This man, with all his sins and follies, had been the first to stretch out his arms to her in her desolation; he had offered her a home when shelter she had none. He had treated her as if she had been the child of his love, instead of only his niece by adoption. She knelt down by him, and threw her white arms round his neck.

"Poor, poor uncle," she whispered, softly, out of the depths of her compassion; and life seemed scarcely long enough for her to repay her debt.

He turned her face to his. "Do as I ask

you, child. Win him to be my friend," he said, huskily.

"If I can, I will," and she looked straight into his anxious eyes, her own as serious as if she were taking an oath.

"God bless you," with a sigh of relief, and he stooped to kiss her.

She drew back, hesitatingly. "Don't thank me. It won't be as you wish. He told me—that is to say—he hinted—that we could never be more than friends," and she hid her blushing face on his shoulder.

"Indeed! Well, I never was more mistaken in my life! Make him like you, if you can," he went on with his usual disregard for any one's feelings but his own; "and when you have won him over, tell him that you will have nothing to say to him unless he treats your poor uncle like a father."

Why was it that a vision seemed to rise before her out of the shadows, a vision of a fair face, with earnest, beseeching eyes, and lips sternly set under their fringe of gold? Ronald Vivian could never claim her for his wife, why should his image come before her now in all its beauty to make life harder than it was already? She rose to her feet with a weary sigh. "My aunt will be wondering where I am."

Sir Charles looked at her pale face curiously. "There is no one else whom you like better?"

"Who should there be?" and she blushed to the curls on her forehead. "Not Frank Verreker, whom I love like a brother."

"Dangerous! if he hadn't one foot in the grave; but he can't hold a candle to St. Aubyn, in the way of looks, and woman are always governed by the eye," he added with a smile as he got up from his seat and stretched out his hand for her hat.

"You are not going to the rooms again tonight?" she said, quickly.

"Needs must when the devil drives," with a shrug of his shoulders. "Your friend has picked my pocket to such an extent that confounded *carte*, that if I can't recoup myself at the tables we shall have to eat our bread without any butter for the future."

"But perhaps you will only lose again," and she laid her hand daintily on his arm.

"Don't stop me, child. It is life or death to me to-night," and his brow clouded. "That man holds paper enough of mine to sell me up in a week. I think he has sworn to ruin me—and he will."

Blanche with a heart full of foreboding, followed him out of the room.

(To be continued.)

ARABI PASHA'S prison is situated behind the New Hotel, Cairo. It was built about fifteen years ago, but is already much out of repair. The building was used in the first instance as a large shop, and was occupied by theatrical costumiers, and later became a warehouse for State furniture. The room in which Arabi is confined contains a camp bed, two chairs, a bench, and an earthen pitcher standing on the window-sill. Arabi's food consists principally of rice, and a boiled fowl is served to him every day.

NATURAL ECONOMISTS.—Most women are natural economists. They have twice the skill of saving that men have. Think of the "auld clothes made to look amain as well as new;" think of the old bonnets retrimmed and brought out in the latest style; think of the twisting and turning, the contriving and saving, to which many a woman resorts to keep her family looking respectable, while her husband never thinks of stinting himself in cigars or liquor. Many a man is kept from pauperism by the contrivings of his wife; many a family owes the comfortable house they inhabit more to the economy of the mother than the savings of the father. Before men talk of the extravagance of women they should endeavour to learn a lesson from their economy.

SUNBEAMS.

Ah, what would the earth be without them?

The sunbeams that sparkle and play,
Gilding castles with splendour about them,
And cots hidden humbly away.
They shine, in the fair summer weather,
On meadow, and hovel, and hall,
And the poor and the wealthy together
May enjoy the sweet sunbeams—for all.

When clouds o'er the cabin are rolling,
And the light hardly penetrates through,
The king in his palace, controlling
His vassals, must feel the gloom too.
And, it may be, the home of the peasant
Is brighter than that of the king;
If he lives in content with the present,
Nor fears what the future may bring.

Through the sunbeams a message is blending,
As they fall on the age-whitened head.
They tell of a glory impending,
Far brighter than any they shed.
They sparkle on youth and on maiden,
They smile upon husband and wife,
And they greet the young mother, hope laden,
With the sunshine and beauty of life.

But if ever in shadows, uncertain,
The lines of your life should be cast,
Fear not, but remember the curtain
Will surely be lifted at last.
If you cherish the love-light that scatters
Doubt, darkness, and gloom from the door,
Clouds may lower, but little it matters,
The sunbeams will shine out once more.

E. L.

STRAYED AWAY.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE WORK-ROOM.

Two girls sat quietly side by side, and Emily resumed her work, lifting her head from time to time to look with eyes brimful of affection at the pensive face of her friend. It was the first time they had met for nearly two years.

"Yes, it is a long story," said Fanny, with a sigh; and, putting a piece of Emily's work in her lap, she began mechanically to sew. "I have seen many changes, Emily, since the last time we were together."

"And I remember that so well," observed Miss White, and she sighed too, as if those two years were not without their memories for her. "We were with your brother Will and Fred Crosby, and we went to the Surrey Theatre. What happy girls we were, Fanny! When I look back, I hardly seem to know myself."

"Have you had troubles?"

"No, dear; only such as come to everyone. I was out of work for a long time, and we were badly off at home."

To be out of work for a long time and badly off at home were common incidents apparently in the history of a work girl, for Emily spoke very quietly, and Fanny heard her without evincing much surprise.

"We think more as we grow older," Emily went on. "I did not mind things then as I do now. I did not see them in the same light, I suppose; but I have seen lately that one cannot always be in a work-room, with no hope of a change for the better."

The girl had, unconsciously to herself, begun to ponder dimly on the great social problem—the misery of poor women, and their place in the labour market. She had been from childhood in the large needlework factories, and seen the career of many a worker from the beginning to the end, and she felt sad when she reflected.

"What change can there be?" asked Fanny.

Emily shook her head. The evil was ap-

parent, but the remedy was far distant from her mind.

"Mrs. Clarke is very kind," she said, "and does the best she can for her people; but she has to be like the rest in some things. There's a poor creature in the next room, the mother of a large family, and Mrs. Clarke keeps her here almost out of compassion. The poor thing is so slow—her sight is bad, you see, and her fingers are not so pliant as they used to be—we cannot put her on delicate work."

"Poor creature!"

"Yet she has been a beautiful hand, but she is past it now, though she is hardly forty."

"What can she do when she leaves?"

"Take shirts or flannel work, and the pay is so bad for that. If she were to slave from morning till night she could not make more than fourpence-halfpenny a day."

"And it might have been so with me, may be so with you and many more," thought Fanny. "It is hard indeed. While we are young and quick it is not so bad; but the hand grows stiff, and the sight weakens as we get older."

"I wonder what has become of Fred," said Emily after a pause. "There was an involuntary interest in her tone that set Fanny thinking.

"I saw him the other day."

"Did you? Where?"

"In the park. We met by accident. Poor Fred."

"How fond he was of you. I have not seen him for a long time now. Fred never liked me." And she sighed.

"Did you care for him, then?"

"More than he is ever likely to know. Love is a game of cross purposes, Fanny. He was dying for you, and you thought nothing of him. I liked him very much, and he disliked me rather than otherwise."

"That may be fancy."

"No," said Emily, with some sadness in her tone. "The last time we met we spoke about you, and he turned upon me quite savagely. 'Things might have been different,' he said, 'if it had not been for me.' I believe he looked upon me as your evil genius, Fanny. I cried when he was gone; it seemed so unkind of him, and I did not deserve it."

"I should not let it trouble me," said Fanny; "you might do much better, I am sure."

Miss White gave her a glance that seemed to ask—"Have you done better?" and Fanny coloured, though there was a little smile on her lips.

"And are you as great a flirt as ever?" Fanny asked, while Emily stitched with the quiet celerity of a practised hand at the endless roll of satin trimming she was putting on a rich dress of heavy material.

Miss White shook her head slowly, though the old light of mischief came back to her eyes.

"No. I am not so thoughtless as I used to be. Girls run great risks by going about in the way we used to."

"We may mean no harm," said Fanny. "With us it was innocent fun, but it was an innocent fun that placed us at the mercy of any mean-spirited boaster. What a lot of simpletons we used to have waiting for us."

And Fanny laughed merrily with her friend. The more pleasant parts of the old life came back with this reunion, and they chatted gaily over many a harmless, though reprehensible frolic.

"You remember Mr. Tidkins," said Emily, "who used to say his name was De Kenric. He told you his father—"

"His pa, please."

"Oh, yes; I forgot the pa. He said his pa was a rich silk merchant in Manchester, and he himself was up in London learning the business. He said his Christian name was Claude, and his friend St. John used to call him Tommy."

"And I expect St. John was the elegant for Jones."

"Not a doubt of it," said Emily: "and let

me see—Mr. St. John was a doctor, was he not?"

"Yes; and we believed him till we saw him in livery by the coachman's side on his master's carriage. How red the poor fellow turned."

"But that was not so bad as Tommy Tidkins, when we went to buy some ribbon in St. Paul's Churchyard, and heard the shopwalker say, 'Now, Mr. Tidkins, serve these young ladies, please, and don't stare.' I really thought he was going to faint."

"Poor Tommy—we never saw him again."

"I know men better than I used," said Emily. "I can pick out the sham gentleman in a moment now, and I don't have much to say to them. If I were going to marry, I would rather have a mechanic than one of those poor genteel well-dressed fellows—they expect too much for their money."

"But you could not marry a working-man, Emily?"

"I could, and would. And why not? A gentleman would not have me—and the poor genteel marry the poor genteel. They have ways of managing that I know nothing about. A working-man is homely, and easily satisfied. He does not care for show, and he will live in a neighbourhood where rent and food are cheap."

"But then their ways and manner?"

"They are the ways and manner of my father and yours," said Emily, quietly. "They do not expect you to pinch and scrape for the sake of keeping up an appearance. And a man with a trade at his fingers' ends earns better wages, and is more certain of work, take the year round, than a man who depends on a situation behind the counter, or at a desk."

"You are quite a little woman of the people, Emily."

"Yes, I know it is best to be content."

"But a working-man with his rough language and coarse habits—and they nearly all drink."

"Nonsense, Fanny. They are as sober and intelligent as their betters—more so, sometimes. I don't believe any working-man would go to the public-house if he were made comfortable at home. I have heard mother say that women don't manage them well, and I believe she is right."

Fanny said nothing. She felt that she was of different mould from her friend, but did not say so.

"A man comes home from a hard day's work, and he finds you untidy and out of temper," Emily went on. "You weary him with a lot of wretched little complaints about domestic matters that have gone wrong in the day. You don't have his tea ready, and the children are up untidy and unruly, and you expect him to put on a pleasant face and stay at home. To me it seems only natural that he should want to get out of the way, where he can be quiet and comfortable."

"You are thoroughly an English workman's daughter, Emily. You have a proper sense of duty," said Fanny, with a smile. "You will be a model wife, I should say."

"I shall try to, if I ever marry. If my husband were a good man I would keep him good; and if he were bad I would try to make him better. What can be so miserable to a man as a fretful-tempered, sulky face, making troubles of every little thing, worrying him about trifles, and always complaining? He wants cheerfulness at home—quiet and comfort. If you give him these, he is glad enough to stay."

"If Fred Crosby only knew," thought Fanny, "here is a treasure for him better than gold."

"Have you been here long?" she asked, after a pause, during which Emily set her at work on a sleeve of a dress she was trimming.

"About eight months. I was fortunate in obtaining such a good situation. I was in the workroom first with the rest, till the forewoman left, and Mrs. Clarke put me in her place while she got another. She found that I answered her purpose quite as well, and so she kept me on."

"You have very much improved."

"How?"

"In every way."

"I am always trying to improve myself," said Emily, simply, "and I am very happy here. My evenings are my own from six till half-past nine."

"Then you sleep here?"

"Yes; sleep and board and have twelve shillings a week. I am able to help them at home now, thank heaven," said the girl with a grateful sigh.

"Have I done well?" pondered Fanny, as the simple words of her friend brought a picture and a contrast to her mind. "Emily has made her parents happy, and they are proud of her. I have made mine miserable, and they are ashamed of me. She is able to help hers; I can do nothing for mine."

Only that the old hope and the old faith came back, Fanny would have taken this deeply to heart. She believed that the end would be a recompense for all things. The pleasant love-dream begun on that fair day at Richmond, when they lingered in the park or on the river, could not be destined to have such a sadly passive termination. The dreamy sentiment Percy had talked to her in the golden twilight would not die away in neglect and indifference. With the return of Percy this gloomy time must fade—these long months of suffering be but a memory.

"How do you spend your evenings?" she inquired of Emily,

"Sometimes I sit with Mrs. Clarke—sometimes I go out."

"Alone?"

"No. A gentleman waits for me nearly every evening."

"A gentleman! Where is your mechanic now?"

"I do not care for Mr. Palmer," said Emily; "but one must walk with somebody. It is mere amusement. He has no intentions, I know."

"And yet you walk with him."

"He is poor and belongs to a proud family," said Emily. "He never offers to take me home, and whenever he talks of love or marriage he brings in more 'ifs' and 'buts' than I care for. I could get fond of him if I had any faith in him."

"What is he?"

"A junior clerk in a City bank. He is honest enough to tell me that."

"I suppose he thinks himself too good for you."

"He says he must marry for money."

"And yet he takes up your time," said Fanny. "Tries to make you love him. You must be careful with him, dear."

"I know," said Emily, lowly, "and so I am. I do not see him more than I can help. I tell him not to come, but he waits for me all the same, and when I see him I cannot be angry."

"You must spend some of your evenings with me, Emily. I don't live far away—just in Pimlico—and you shall see my baby. I can confide in you."

Emily looked pleased. With the innate good taste of a kindly heart she had asked no questions, but waited for this confidence to come.

"Tell me what you like, Fanny, and I shall believe you."

She looked wistfully at Fanny's wedding-ring, then said,—

"Some people said you were really married."

Fanny bent lower over her work in sad silence. Emily interpreted that silence at its worst, and did not seek to penetrate the painful secret.

"How long has he been gone?" she asked.

"Ten months."

"And how old is baby?"

"Four."

"Poor Fanny! A little girl!"

"No, a boy—little Alfred. Will you come home with me this evening, and see him?"

"Yes. Then we can have a nice long chat, and tell each other everything."

Mrs. Clarke came in here, and found the two girls working quietly together. She was glad to see them on such excellent terms, and had no suspicion they had met before. Emily was too generous in nature to wish to destroy the high impression Mrs. Clarke had formed of her friend.

"How does Mrs. Percy work?" the dressmaker asked.

"Very nicely indeed."

"Are you agreeable to have her in your room?"

"Quite—thank you."

"That is right. I thought you would like each other, and you require an assistant. If I had taken one of the young ladies from the room, it would only have created a jealousy with the rest, and so it is better for you to have a stranger. And you think you will like being here?"

"I am sure, I shall," said Fanny, gratefully.

"That is right. Miss White will tell me how you get on, and we will see what we can do by-and-by."

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. PALMER.

FANNY was glad when six o'clock came. She had suffered all the mental torture of a young mother when for the first time away for many hours from her darling. She had said, "I wonder how my baby is?" so frequently as the afternoon wore on, that Emily knew what was coming by the sigh that preceded the wondering.

Miss White had finished her work and cleared up by six. She was very orderly and methodical, thanks to her experience in City work-rooms. They had men in the City for taskmasters, and even if the men were not so kind or considerate as they might have been, the girls benefited by the discipline; it taught them the value of time and punctuality, though sometimes the teaching might have been given with more kindness and better temper.

Out of the twelve young ladies in the long room three were married, and these hurried home to put a trim touch to the housework and prepare tea for their respective husbands. Then there was the poor creature of whom Emily had spoken so pitifully; then the two apprentices, the daughters of respectable tradesmen, and put with Mrs. Clarke more to keep them out of mischief than from any other motive. They were not let out except in charge of the shopwomen, and they had to coax and bribe her out of a ramble to themselves.

The other six young ladies went off in pairs, leaving care behind them till the morning, and looking out for something to make fun of the moment they were outside the door.

If the gentlemen who passed and tried to look killing at them had heard the private opinions of these young ladies concerning their personal style and beauty, their dignified self-satisfaction would have sunk considerably.

They were very happy; demure as kittens, as playful and as full of mischief. Their opinions on the men had no medium. It was either "He's a darling!" or, "Oh, he's a guy!" The only modifications were, "a little bit nice," or "dreadful."

"Here's one coming," said one of the girls. "What funny legs he's got. I saw him last night. He was in a pie shop, and thought nobody was looking. I'll look at him sideways, and he will think I have fallen in love."

And she did look at him. The bright eyes pierced him for a moment and then dropped. The victim was a soldier in the Life Guards, really a well-built fellow, except that his lower limbs were rather weedy. He turned back, sure that he had made a conquest. One of the girl's peeped over the other's shoulder, and the hero took that as a sign of encouragement. He followed, spoke to them, and was met by a

haughty little stare of surprise, and a peremptory command to go about his business.

Yet when he strode away, disconcerted, he fancied that the girls were laughing under their bonnets—and so they were.

That was what the girls, one and all, thought glorious fun, and it was repeated as often as occasion served. Sometimes a separation was caused by the mysterious appearance of "a friend." If he was a particular friend, the girls said "good-bye" to each other, and one went with him—if it was only a little flirtation, he was honoured by the company of two tormenters. They were very generous to one another, and went share even in a sweetheart with a kindness chiefly agreeable to themselves.

Somehow they had heard of the "new hand who was in Miss White's room," and Fanny received considerable attention when she went out with Emily. Opinions differed considerably concerning her beauty—good looks, rather—no true daughter of Eve ever sees more than one beauty in the course of her lifetime—her figure, her dress, her walk, the colour of her eyes—the reality of her hair—what her complexion was—whether she used "violet" or "bloom" &c. One girl was sure she turned her toes in; another that she turned them up when walking; a third didn't think she had a nice back; a fourth was certain she paddled, and a fifth found fault with Fanny's pretty nose. There was not much left of Fanny by the time the sixth had done with her.

Mr. Palmer was waiting for Emily. She saw him and named him in a low tone to Fanny, who looked with some interest at a man of whose good intentions she was in doubt.

He was a tolerably handsome fellow, gentlemanly, but not a gentleman. There were discrepancies in his dress, though he represented the latest fashion from head to foot. His manners were good, his voice quiet, and he had evidently studied the play of his eyes by the way he used them when he addressed Emily.

She shook hands with him—drawn towards him by a secret liking that fought with her secret misgiving. His bearing was sufficiently respectful; but Fanny, wiser than Emily by experience, saw the undercurrent of his nature, and knew that it was not a good one.

"I am going to Pimlico with my friend," said Emily, "and I did not expect you this evening."

"No!" he said, in the voice that he had always found tell with simple girls. "I ought not to have come; but the Brompton pavement has an irresistible fascination for my footsteps. I find myself coming here unconsciously."

Fanny thought it would be wise of him, and good for Emily, if he were to exercise a little more self-control.

"May I walk with you as far?" he asked, speaking to Emily, but questioning Fanny with his eyes, "and wait?"

"I may be a long time."

"Yes, but I am patient."

He placed himself between the girls without waiting a denial. He had an assured grace that carried him through when less confident and better men would have failed. Emily took his left arm. He offered his right to Fanny, and she declined it with a quiet—

"Thanks, I prefer walking alone."

The tone, its quiet dignity and perfect self-possession startled Mr. Palmer into surprise. He had not looked at Fanny yet with particular attention. Seeing her come from Mrs. Clarke's establishment with Emily, he inferred that she was a work-room companion, and scarcely gave her a second glance.

Now he looked at her, and was struck by her beauty. He was impressed by the refined instinct that made her walk, and speak, and look like a lady. She was superior to her friend in personal attractions; and had Mr. Palmer a regard been worth a straw to Emily, she would have had cause to regret the meeting. Palmer altered and heightened the

tone of his conversation for Fanny's sake. He talked at her, when he spoke to Miss White.

In general he came down to the level of Emily's comprehension. The girl was intelligent, but she had not had Fanny's opportunities of self-culture.

Fanny said very little on the way; but the little that she did made Mr. Palmer own that she was his equal, and more than his equal.

He talked stagey sentimental flattery, till he saw the contemptuous smile on Fanny's lips, and then he rose to common-sense, and discussed everyday topics with rather more than average ability. He said good things second-hand, and related little polished anecdotes from the higher class magazines as if the anecdotes were his own; but Fanny, who mixed her reading, and read well, found him out, and made him aware quietly that she detected the imposture.

The vanity of the man was piqued. Masculine vanity is irritably sensitive, and makes its owner painfully conscious of unpleasant truths in spite of himself. He was considered clever; but to Fanny, who had known an Arthur Wilson, he was nothing. He was considered handsome, but Percy was handsomer, Arthur Wilson handsomer still.

He left them at the corner of Maplestreet. Fanny made a decided stand there, and Palmer had no alternative but to lift his hat and depart; his last words, spoken in an undertone, were,—

"I shall wait."

The two girls went up to Fanny's rooms. Fanny had a latch key, and did not trouble the Naylor's to open the door. When there was a knock—and the knocks were very frequent indeed—five little Naylor's at least ran to the passage, one to open the door, and the rest to stare with wild hair and smoky faces at the visitor; their fingers were damp and sticky as a rule, and Fanny, careful of her dress, avoided the small Naylor's as much as possible.

Polly was in a chair by the fire in the front room, jogging baby up and down on one knee, and chanting a whole series of nursery ballads, beginning with "Little Bo Peep," and ending with "Hush a bye baby, on the tree top," "Bo Peep" was the favourite. Polly grew quite pathetic over it, and sang it like a psalm.

The little nurse was faithful to her charge. She would not leave the room for anything. They sent her dinner upstairs, and as she dined off thick bread and thin treacle, with baby in her lap, baby was much smeared.

"Baby's bib is very wet," said Fanny, as soon as she could get him from Emily, who had cleared off the treacle and kissed every atom of his face from chin to forehead, finishing with two on the top of his head and one on the back of his neck.

"Yes, ma'am, he plunges so. He upset my mug of milk-and-water when I was having dinner."

Kicking over Polly's milk-and-water appeared to be a gratifying achievement; for Fanny hugged baby rapturously, and said—

"Little darling! Has he been good?"

"Good as gold, ma'am!"

Gold was Poly's superlative standard of goodness. Fanny could have told her that baby was better than the world's whole lot of its yellow dross.

Miss White made herself at home. She prepared tea while Fanny nursed her infant; and while Emily was busy with the table she had an observant eye on her friend. The young mother's brow was quite unclouded—the tranquil happiness in her face had no tinge of the melancholy that must have been had there been a stain on baby's birth.

"I wonder if they are really!" Emily thought, half filling the little brown stone-china teapot, and putting it on the hob to draw. "I do believe they are. Fanny could not be so happy if they were not."

She had to be satisfied with her own inference, for Fanny said little on that subject. They sat long over their tea. It might have

been the most fragrant of the Celestial growth or the driest and most flavourless of Pekoe or Souchong, for all the attention they gave it. The tea grew cold in its cups, and the two girls went on talking and listening alternately, they had so much to say. Two years of feminine history takes a long time in telling.

Emily had comparatively nothing to tell. The romance of life had fallen to Fanny's lot, and Fanny, truth to say, felt herself something of a heroine now that she had a confidential listener. She told Emily everything, faithfully and without reserve, always excepting her marriage. That was a secret, sealed up and put away with the packet that held her certificate, and lay in a small box by itself in the corner of her heaviest portmanteau.

And Miss White fell in love with Arthur Wilson, as Fanny pictured him. Women have an instinctive reverence for true gentlemen.

"And yet you left him without letting him know where you were going?" said Emily, when Fanny finished the Paxton-street episode. "I wonder that you did not worship him with your whole heart."

"I shall be true to my old love," said Fanny, with a smile. "You would not have me give up every hope of him?"

If Miss White had spoken what she felt, that question would have been answered in the affirmative. As it was she held her peace.

"The links of a love like ours are too strong to be broken by a separation, however long that separation may be," Fanny went on in a tone of confidence; and then she added, as Emily's countenance expressed a sort of pitying doubt, "You do not know what affection is. Sweetheart love and wife love are so different. The father of my little one is no dearer to me than I am to him, and he is very dear to me."

"I daresay they will do their best to keep him away," said Emily, giving comfort with her tongue, though in her heart she felt that Fanny's story was the old story; "but he will come back by-and-by. Men who go away like that cannot forget—they must long to return. They have the best of intentions, and mean to behave well in the end. The thing is, that the intentions may weaken when new temptations come."

"I should not like to be at the mercy of a man's intentions," thought Fanny. "That would be a very barren trust, even with Percy. I can afford to be patient, because I know my power."

"How long have you known Mr. Palmer?" she asked, changing the conversation, as it began to trench upon the guarded circle of her secret.

"Some few months."

"I should not advise you to walk with him. He thinks too much of himself, too little of you. There is meanness in him—vice in him. He looks upon you as a poor, pretty work-girl—something to be trifled with and cast aside, because he is—or thinks he is—a gentleman."

There was honest, stinging truth in these plain words—a truth that girls frequently see and try not to see. Fanny did not encourage the affection that nibbles at the truth, and, while perfectly aware of the danger, protests that no such danger exists.

"There are plenty of men like Mr. Palmer," Fanny went on. "They have neither soul nor conscience in regard to women, whom they are pleased to consider their inferiors. They are thoroughly selfish, and as bad as they can be."

"Yes, I know that," said Emily. "but I am quite safe. Mr. Palmer has not shown the cloven hoof; yet if he ever does, I shall discard him."

"On the instant?"

"On the instant. I tell you, Fanny, I know him thoroughly. I know exactly what he thinks of me. He is kind enough to amuse me, and his company protects me from others of his kind. When I marry, I will marry a

working man, an intelligent, honest fellow, who will be fond of me."

"If Mr. Palmer were to ask you to be his wife?"

"I would refuse him," said Emily, without a moment's hesitation. "He would think he had done me an honour, and he would look down upon me from the little height of his poor gentility."

The good common sense of that reply satisfied Fanny that Emily had nothing to fear from Mr. Palmer or herself.

Time sped rapidly in conversation. Fanny, looking at her watch, found that it was nine o'clock, and they did not seem to have been together an hour. Emily departed soon after nine.

Mr. Palmer was patient. He had waited three hours and a quarter, drinking an occasional glass of bitter beer, and smoking some cheap cigars. He could watch the door of Fanny's house from the tavern in Maple-street, and so he drank his bitter and smoked, thinking more of Fanny than of Emily, and wondering whether he had made an impression.

"I am sorry to have been so long," said Emily, as he pressed her hand with quiet fervour; "I did not think you would wait all this time."

"You see I am patient. I could not let you go back alone."

"It is very kind of you."

He smiled. There is little kindness in the tireless patience of the hawk when it is following its prey.

Fanny took to thinking when Emily was gone. The story of those last two years had made her recollection vivid. She remembered Emily's words, and sighed involuntarily over them.

"I should have worshipped such a man with my whole heart," Emily had said, and Fanny did not care to express how her own feeling for Arthur was akin to the worship Emily spoke of. The poor girl longed to return to that peaceful, happy home in Paxton-street.

Mr. Wilson had not forgotten Fanny in her absence. He missed the sweet face that had grown familiar to him—the quiet voice that responded to his spoken thoughts, and always responded with the sympathy of one whose soul was kindred with his own.

And Fanny had not forgotten him. He had a very tender place in her memories. She had often thought of the pleasant evenings in Paxton-street, and sometimes she longed for the kindly voice and kindly face of Arthur's mother. Often when going from Pimlico to Brompton in the morning, and from Brompton to Pimlico in the evening, she was deep in reverie, and Arthur had a large share of that sadly pleasing reverie. It was something to be loved by such a man, even though Fanny knew the love was hopeless.

Arthur met her once. She was returning from work, and had taken the Park way for a change. She had passed the gate by Buckingham Palace, when a quiet footstep quickened behind her, and a low, rich voice said—

"Mrs. Percy. Frances!"

Fanny was thinking of Arthur Wilson just at that moment—and there he was.

(To be continued.)

ONE OF THE FAMILY.—When Mlle. Rachel was at the height of her popularity Dr. Veron, ex-manager of the opera and author of the "Mémoires d'un Bourgeois de Paris," who was a frequent visitor at her house, happening one day to differ from her on some matter connected with the theatre, she flew into a violent passion and called him to his face *vieille canaille*. Next day she had forgotten all about it; but Veron could not so easily get over the obnoxious epithet and told her so. "Bah!" retorted the actress. "you ought, on the contrary, to be highly flattered at being treated like one of the family!"

TO THE WORLD GUILTY.

CHAPTER XL.

A LIVING TOMB.

So clearly had the evidence adduced at the trial proved Gwendolen Stanhope's insanity—so clearly had she herself borne witness to its truth, that the evidence of the physicians who examined her was simply formal, and the hapless prisoner was, in the usual manner, simply condemned to be detained in confinement "during Her Majesty's pleasure."

But on the very evening of the day of the trial Lochisla had communicated with the Home Secretary, requesting that Dr. Brandon might, so soon as he and his fellow-physician had given their report, be empowered to remove the prisoner to the asylum in which her mother was confined.

It was not likely, under the circumstances, that such a request from such a quarter would be disregarded; and a reply was promptly returned stating that Dr. Brandon would be immediately empowered to make the removal, subject, of course, to the subsequent approval of the prisoner's relatives, who, it appeared from Lord Lochisla's letter, were not now in a position to take action in the matter.

Meanwhile Lochisla had telegraphed to Louis Stanhope's steward for instant news of his master; and he wrote to Miss Philippa, stating the steps he had taken with regard to Gwendolen.

The reply came back that, immediately on reading the account of the trial, Louis Stanhope had fallen into a deadly swoon, in which he still lay. The physician attending him could not yet say what the result might be. Miss Philippa was not able to attend to anything. The steward would send another message so soon as any change took place in his master's condition. Miss Philippa was deeply grateful to Lord Lochisla, and would write to him the moment she was able to do so.

The Earl did not keep from Hyacinth the contents of these messages, and her one wish was to go to Louis.

"When it is possible, my child," said the Earl gently, "you shall go. I will take you to him; but you could not bear the journey yet," and Hyacinth knew that he was right.

Madge Adams had immediately left for Stanhope Lea, and a day later Lochisla went to Braybrooke, and learned from Dr. Brandon that Gwendolen had offered no resistance to her removal, and was at the present time sunk again in apathy.

He did not think she would live long, for although her frame was robust, the circumstances that had been the immediate cause of developing her latent insanity preyed upon her mind.

Her mother's memory was a blank, but Dr. Brandon did not believe Gwendolen's would ever become so.

Happier for her if death came quickly. Who could desire long life for one so awfully afflicted?

"If you would like to see her," Dr. Brandon added, "she would not now take the least notice of you."

But the soldier who had faced a hundred battles turned white and drew back.

"I held her in my arms once," he said. "I kissed her with a lover's kiss. I would give years of life that I had never seen her with Heaven's doom upon her. How could I willingly look on her in her humiliation?"

CHAPTER XLII.

AT REST.

"He has not, I fear, an hour to live." So spoke the physician in attendance on Louis Stanhope to Errol Cameron.

From that deep swoon into which the terrible revelation of Gwendolen's madness had thrown him, Louis had awoken only to rave in wild delirium.

For days he had hovered between life and death, and during that time it was useless for any one to see him; indeed, the excitement of meeting Hyacinth or Lochisla would probably have been almost instantly fatal.

So soon, however, as Hyacinth was able to travel, Lochisla took her to Thorndean.

She could, of course, remain at Stanhope Lea, while he would go to Falcon's Rest, and thus both would be on the spot; for it was certain that should the delirium pass death would quickly come upon the sufferer.

Lochisla had sent a telegram to say they would arrive that day, for Hyacinth would not hear of any delays in the journey; she was strong now, she insisted, and seemed to have a kind of presentiment that she should never see her cousin again in life if she did not make all haste.

So the transit from Derbyshire into Berkshire was made without any break, and Hyacinth would not even stop for ten minutes' rest at the Thorndean station.

The travellers were driven straight to Stanhope Lea, and the words of the physician, who came down to them at once, were a startling confirmation of Hyacinth's fears.

"Is he sensible?" she said, quickly; "may we see him?"

"This morning at five o'clock," said the physician, "the delirium left him. Since then he has been very calm, but sinking rapidly. He asked for his cousin Hyacinth and Lord Lochisla, and we told him you would come to-day. You had better go to him at once—no excitement can hurt him now. Nothing can save him, and he has no wish to live."

Hyacinth flung off her hat and mantle, and in silence, deathly white, but very calm, went up with Lochisla to the sick chamber.

"He guesses you are here," said the physician in a whisper. "I will wait outside. Miss Philippa Stanhope is lying down for a little rest."

The door opened gently and Madge Adams appeared—a quick hand-clasp from each, a low spoken, "Thank God you are in time," from the woman, and she gestured to them to enter.

There on the bed, with the grey shadow of death on his thin haggard face, lay Louis Stanhope; too weak to rise, he could only stretch out his hands, while a strange solemn joy lighted up his eyes as they rested on Hyacinth. The girl sprang to the bedside and knelt by him, clasping her arms about him and bending her face to his, in a passion of voiceless, tearless grief—grief that could not, nay, that would not hope. Louis drew her close to him and kissed her tenderly, looking into her face with a smile of perfect peace and restfulness.

"Do not weep for me, dear, dear Hyacinth," he whispered, faintly. "You could not wish me to live now. Heaven has been kind to grant my prayer that I might see you before I died; and him also whom I unwittingly wronged, and who I know now to be ten thousand times more worthy of you than I could have ever been. Where is he?"

Lochisla had paused near the door. He came forward to the dying man's side, and Louis looked up into the dark, noble face with all that his feeble strength failed him to utter in his yearning eyes. He held out his hand, and the Earl clasped it in his own, and stooped and reverently kissed the livid brow, damp with the dews of approaching death.

Louis smiled, as a child might smile under the touch of a mother's lips.

"I know now," he said, in low broken whispers, "how I wronged you. I know that no nobler man ever breathed on God's earth than Errol Cameron; and you would have spared me who had condemned you. Death would have saved me from the knowledge you would have kept from me; but it was better—better to live—for this moment. Oh, forgive—for give the wrong—"

"Louis! Louis!" said Lochisla, in a choked voice, and he clasped more closely the hand he held, "there was no wrong. You could not

but condemn me. I have nothing to forgive in you, or in anyone."

Louis looked from the face that bent over him to the face resting against him.

"She had faith," he said, "but then she loved you, and she is like you—too noble for most men and women to understand."

He was silent a moment or two, then his face changed, and he said,—

"I am happier to know that Gwendolen knew not what she did. It was worse to believe her a murderer; and the curse dies with me. It is Heaven's mercy. Lochisla, she—is—"

The Earl answered the question the dying man could not complete.

"She is in Dr. Brandon's care," he said, gently; "you will trust her welfare to me, Louis?"

"To you? Oh, noblest, truest—" He gasped for breath, but ineffable gratitude shone in his eyes, on which the last film was gathering.

Lochisla turned to Madge, and whispered to her to fetch Miss Philippa, and she went out quickly and noiselessly.

Louis had closed his eyes now, and was breathing slowly and irregularly, and the Earl felt the hand he still held growing colder in his clasp.

"Louis," whispered Hyacinth.

He smiled a bright, sweet smile, and moved a little the arm that was round her, so that he could softly caress the rich curls, but his eyes remained closed.

Miss Philippa and Madge came in together, the physician following, but Lochisla held up a warning hand, and they paused a few feet from the bedside, awestruck and silent. They saw that the end was come.

Slowly the dying eyes opened and turned to Hyacinth. He tried to speak, and failing, strove again.

"When—I am dead—will you—" a pause—"flow—flowers—on my breast? I—I shall know."

"Yes, Louis."

She pressed her warm trembling lips to those ashen lips—one parting smile of deep, utter peace flickered over them and under the closing eyelids; and gently, tenderly, Hyacinth drew away the arm that supported him, and laid the head back on the pillow. Louis Stanhope slept.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"CAMERON'S HYACINTH."

WHEN the dead man's will was opened it was found that he had left the income of his property between Miss Philippa and his sister Gwendolen. Gwendolen to have Stanhope Lea, with reversion to "my dear cousin" Hyacinth Vernon; and to Hyacinth also was left the reversion of the income.

The circumstances that had occurred since the making of that will had, of course, rendered one of its provisions inoperative, but Hyacinth waived all claim to Stanhope Lea in favour of Miss Philippa while her aunt lived; and Miss Philippa would be happier there, she said, than anywhere else.

She was completely crushed and broken, and her old independence and vigour had quite left her.

It was Errol of Lochisla, condemned, despised, who—it might well be thought—would never set foot within the walls of Stanhope Lea again, who arranged everything; and Hyacinth, controlling her own bitter grief, comforted the unhappy woman.

"I was unjust to you—harsh to you, Hyacinth," he said, "and you forgive me; and I loved my brother's children so dearly—and one is worse than dead—and one dead, and he is happiest—for happier than I."

Aye, he was at peace, with the white flowers on his breast.

"Weeds be for them that are left behind,
And not for them that fall."

It was a quiet funeral in the early morning; and hour and day being kept secret the vulgar crowd that would have gathered to witness it

—attracted by the sensational interest that attached to all concerned—were deprived of their feast of curiosity.

Only a few relatives and intimate friends were present; the latter including, besides Lochisla and Hyacinth, Lady Loring, Mrs. Sandon, and Herbert Hazlemere. Lady Loring wished to take Hyacinth back with her to Bramblemere at once; but as Lochisla remained at Stanhope Lea for a few days till certain business matters were settled, the girl shook her head, and thanking her kind hostess, appealed to the Earl.

"Let me remain here," she said, wistfully.

He understood her—only he could be any help to her just now, and he let her have her way.

"I would rather see you weep, heart's dearest," he said to her that night when he was dismissing her to her room, and he looked wistfully into the dry, glittering eyes.

The girl sighed heavily, and leaned her head against him.

"I cannot weep," she said, wearily; "besides, I must bear up for poor Aunt Philippa's sake."

And grave and tearless she went about the house, where only a few short months before she had sung her German *lieder* and French *chansons*, and Louis's bright voice had answered her call. And now he was lying still and silent, all alone with the flowers on his breast.

But he knew her hand had placed them there—he felt her touch—he felt her tears fall on his brow, and heard her whispered prayer for him.

Why should we doubt that our dead are with us still, and read our hearts in our acts and words?

"Are souls straight:—so happy that, dizzy with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive not of woe?
I think not. Themselves were too lately forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which reconciled so
The Above and below."

Hyacinth remained the guest of Lady Loring at that lady's special request. Lochisla would not hear of her remaining at Stanhope Lea, knowing the effect the associations would have upon her sensitive temperament.

He himself remained at Bramblemere—Lady Loring would not allow him to depart—till December, when he was obliged to return to Germany.

"Must you go?" said Lady Loring, looking dismayed when he told her.

"Dear madame, an officer in the German army has not unlimited leave. I can return again, but I must e'en go now—that is, in a fortnight."

"But, Hyacinth, does she know?"

"Not yet. I have not known it twenty minutes myself."

"Shall you take her with you, Lochisla?"
The Earl started.

"Mein, nein! so soon? I would not ask it
—I could not so wound her."

"Always the same, Lochisla. You never
think of self. I wonder how many men since
'creation's dawn' have been like you?"

The Earl winced, and turned away to seek Hyacinth.

He found her in the library, sitting by the fire reading, robed in the deep weeds of mourning.

She looked up, smiling, as he came in, and dropped her book.

"You have something to tell me, Count Errol?"

"Not pleasant news for either of us," he said, pausing by the mantelpiece, and looking down half sadly on her lifted face. "I must go back to Berlin in a fortnight's time."

"Oh, Errol!"

Her face flushed and grew pale in a breath.

"Ah! well," said he, gently, "my leave has been already extended, and I need not be away very long—no longer than you wish, sweet heart."

He held out his hand to her, and she rose up

and went to him, and nestled within his circling arm.

"When may I come back for you, Hyacinth? Think not of me, only of your wishes; they are—*as they have ever been—mine.*"

"What can I answer, Errol, when you will breathe no word of your own wish?"

"That were to reverse the rule, my Hyacinth," said the Earl, passing his hand softly over the golden head. "I would rather wait a year for the right to call thee all my own than wound thee by asking what thine own free will would not have given."

Hyacinth was silent for a moment. Then she said, in a low tone, "And if I shall say April, will it seem to thee too long?"

"No, heart's dearest," he stooped and kissed her; "a week, thou knowest, is long without thee; but the fulfilling of thy wish will make four months short; and, in truth, it is a briefer time of waiting than I had dared to hope."

"You tempt me," said the girl, a little wickedly, "to say June instead."

"Nay, I have thy promise, and wilt hold to it; and it may be, after all, in thine own Vienna that I shall claim it."

Hyacinth clasped her hands.

"In Vienna! You do not jest, Errol?"

"Not so, my heart. Lady Loring spoke of going to Vienna in the spring—that is all."

A shade fell on Hyacinth's brow.

"Only last April I left Vienna, Errol," she said, slowly, "and next April—one year—one little year; and how much has happened in it."

"Aye," said Lochisla, "and last April methought I might never hold thee to this heart again, and next April 'Cameron's Hyacinth' will be his indeed."

It was, as Lord Lochisla had predicted, in "her own" Vienna that Hyacinth Vernon became the wife of the famous "Count Cameron." It was a sight not soon to be forgotten, that marriage in St. Stephen's grand cathedral; and conspicuous among the glittering uniforms was that of a very illustrious personage very near the German throne, who, with his wife, came to do honour to the wedding of the Earl of Lochisla and "Our Hyacinth," and a goodly company of Count Cameron's own Uhlaans were present, and many a noble and fair lady; but there was no woman so beautiful as the bride, and no man so handsome as Errol, Earl of Lochisla, who wore his Uhlan uniform, and on his breast—glittering with orders—shone conspicuously that which the Emperor's own hand had lately placed there—the order rarely bestowed on any but crowned heads. Errol of Lochisla had laid down name and fame and love at the feet of honour; and he had gained his reward.

[THE END.]

It rained the other evening, and there was an entertainment. A young gentleman said to a young lady, "May I have the pleasure of protecting you with my umbrella?" And said she, with her round, expressive eyes looking full into his, "Put up your rag." We like to see young people sociable.

A *worrx* clergyman in the west of Scotland was regularly annoyed in the forenoon service by a sleepy carrier. In the course of visiting, Saunders was remonstrated with for his drowsiness, and pleaded as an excuse heavy work and porridge for breakfast. His clerical guide advised tea, but to this Saunders demurred, as tea "wouldna lie" on his stomach. It happened one very warm day that the minister felt sorely annoyed at the hearty snore of Saunders, who sat in the gallery. Stopping suddenly in the middle of his sermon, the reverend gentleman, who knew every member of his congregation, called out to John Blunt to awaken Saunders. This having been done, to the perfect bewilderment of the sleeper, he was thus addressed—"Saunders, this will never do. Ye maun either no' come to the kirk in the forenoon or tak' a tea breakfast."

"IF ONLY."

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBTING BRIDEGROOM.

"Why cannot he wait till I am ready, how tire-some," exclaimed a girl with a witching mignon face, as a bright pink flush mounted to her cheeks and brow.

"Oh! do see him; he will not detain you, he says, but a few minutes, there's a darling," replied one of the maidens, who were assisting to robe her.

This was the bridal morn of Vera Norton, and Dame Nature was very lavish with her jewels that glorious summer's morning; they lay among the grass, sparkling and gleaming in the sunshine; on every shrub and flower she had hung her diamonds.

"If he very much wishes it I will see him, but—" and she looked down, blushing and perplexed, at the loose white robe, and added, appealingly, "I have only my dressing-gown, and it is not quite the costume to meet him in, you know, Hettie."

"Oh! that's no matter!" said a chorus of fresh young voices.

"Why, in half-an-hour he will be your husband, so you are what I call half married already," said the eldest bridesmaid. "Besides, my aunt, whom I look upon as a perfect oracle, pronounces my ball dresses far less respectable than my morning robes, fair Vera."

A gentle tap at the door, and a soft voice says, "Come in, Frank," as the troop of damsels file out.

Very lovely she looked in her soft virgin-white robes, as she stands looking shyly and bewilderingly radiant and sweet before her bridegroom; but on glancing shyly up into his face, she exclaimed,—

"Why, Frank, what makes you so pale? And why you are not dressed, and I—I am all but ready. Speak, dear Frank, are you ill, or has something dreadful occurred?"

He was pale, and a heavy, gloomy frown clouded his fine open brow; he was certainly not a very cheerful looking bridegroom.

Going suddenly up to her, he caught the little white hand and held it in an iron grasp, and said hoarsely,—

"Vera, for Heaven's sake be candid with me; should this marriage take place? Speak before it's too late; mind, in a very few minutes it will be irrevocable."

"Too late," she faltered, with trembling lips, as she sank on a couch for support. "Oh, Frank! I explain; something dreadful has happened!"

"I cannot; I have come to you, Vera, to do that," was the bitter reply.

"I cannot even dream, dearest Frank," she said, with wondering tear-bedewed eyes, "what all this misery means on our bridal-morning."

"I simply ask you, Vera, if it would not be better for us both to stop this marriage?"

"Stop our marriage!" and she looked at him with amazement, as she stood up before him, looking for all the world like a crushed lily. All colour had faded from her face and even her lips, as she added, "something has happened or you would never pain me like this; for mercy's sake do not keep me in suspense."

"I tell you that nothing has happened," he returned.

"And yet you ask me to stop our wedding! Oh! say it's some test you have thought to try me with. Say, Frank, that's only a jest!"

"I regret I cannot, Vera, and I command you to answer me truly, as you value your future happiness—ought we to become husband and wife?"

In his agitation he almost hurt the little hand that lay like a snowflake in his nervous clasp, as with anxious eyes he scanned her every feature, as if to read her answer in her mobile face.

At length she realized that it was an indig-

nity cast upon her by the man that her heart had chosen for its mate, and whom she had loved and trusted beyond all men.

The fire of indignation shone in her large brown eyes, and the warm blood mantled her cheeks, as rising proudly, and confronting him, she said,—

"You say, when I ask you what has happened to cause your strange conduct—nothing; then my answer is, let the marriage take place as arranged, as it is not very likely I should care to be made a laughing-stock among my friends and relations."

At this moment several impatient taps at the door, followed by noisy voices calling upon Frank to turn out or there will be no wedding at all, put an end to the interview.

Opening the door he strode past the merry clamorous group, with a look of doubt and pain on his handsome face.

"Why! I declare you look more like Banquo's ghost than of a happy bridegroom," exclaimed the saucy Lady Hettie, as he sped past them hurriedly to gain his chamber to don the customary orthodox suit of black and grey, and she adds, "Come, girls, let's make haste with our fairy bride," saying which they all entered the room and found her sitting quietly down with flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes, lost in bitter questioning thought.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Vera? or am I to take your place at the altar this morning," said Lady Hettie merrily, as she and her friends hurried about and collected the flowers and jewels.

At last Vera Norton was dressed, and stood in the quaint old-fashioned church where she had been christened by the same clergyman whose hair was white with the snows of many a winter.

The bright rich colours from a window fell with soft shades, and shed its glorious tints upon the snowy satin robe, the gleaming jewels, and the orange flowers which seemed to tremble as if swayed by a summer's breeze, but the Brussels lace veil concealed a pale tear-stained little face!

The service was over, the last blessing had been given by her old friend, who had just made her a wife; friends crowded round her to pour their congratulations upon her—many of them with envy at the bottom of their hearts at the bright future that lay before the bride.

A timid little hand was placed in the arm of her husband as he led her out into the brilliant sunshine past the group of friends and villagers who strewed flowers in her path murmuring blessings upon the head of their much-loved favourite.

Just as Frank Beverley was handing his wife into the carriage, dark heavy clouds began to gather around, but she heeded not outward signs of weather, but sat like a crushed snowdrop, contemplating the events of that morning that for months she had been dwelling on with sweet rapture.

"And this is my supposed happiest day of my life," she thought.

And he sat moodily saying to himself,—

"How beautiful she is, but how treacherous and false, and how mad I was to allow this farce to go on. Great Heavens, women are Satan in disguise, and are sent to allure us to perdition."

No word was exchanged, and they reached Sunnybank, the dear old home of her childhood, and she walked straight up into her chamber, where her pent up sorrow burst forth in a perfect storm, like the elements that were raging now in full force.

She threw herself on her couch, all crushed, heedless of her costly robes, a prey to despair and sorrow. But when the paroxysm was over, it dawned upon her that she must play her part bravely, and when she rejoined her newly-wedded husband, and took her place at the table, it was with sparkling eyes and a fitful, but feverish flow of spirits.

All the guests, especially the male portion, thought she had never looked so lovely, and

warmly congratulated and envied the happy man who had picked out so great a prize, and began to cast about them for a sweet girlish face to appropriate for their own particular property.

"For you know, old fellow, it's deuced slow work these weddings," whispered Couyers Hamilton to his friend, Lord Hargrave, "and only makes us men feel that it would be a relief to kick the lucky fellow, best man and all, out into the cold, and drive off with the bride."

"I am of your opinion, my boy, and look upon the whole thing as a bore, a confounded nuisance," replied his lordship, in a languid tone.

"At any rate, there are some pretty girls here to help us bear it, old fellow; so here goes for a dip in the lottery basket," said Hamilton, laughingly.

The gathering storm which swept with all its violence when Vera and her husband were driving from the church, has entirely subsided, and delicate blue and silver clouds have taken the place of the dark over-hanging pall, that had overspread the earth but a few short hours before.

The last good-byes had been said, and Vera, who was an orphan, never thought how wretched and hopeless she would feel when parting from her aunt, who had taken the place of a mother from the time she was two years old.

Right nobly had Mrs. Cleevdon carried out the trust committed to her charge.

Vera was the only child of her youngest sister, who married a young ensign for the simple reason that he was the one king of her heart, the one love of her life.

Her father thought fit to shut his doors in the face of the offending pair, and also his purse-strings; but Julia Cleevdon always enlisted a firm friend to her young sister, and enlisted her husband, who was then alive, in their cause.

But trouble came upon the young couple as Madras, where Norton was stationed, was visited with a malignant low fever, and two years after Mrs. Norton became a bride she was left a widow, with one weakly child, that was fast fading before the widowed mother's eyes.

Fearing that her darling would be taken from her she started for England as soon as she had seen the earth closed over her beloved husband, determined to fight even the death angel itself for the precious life of his child.

Grief and the effects of the Indian climate had done its work only too perceptibly on the always fragile, delicate frame of the young widow, and she gradually faded from the anxious loving eyes of her sister, who hoped against hope to save her.

Mrs. Norton lived but four months after her husband; the doctors pronounced her malady rapid decline, but a broken heart would have been the correct term for it.

Little Vera improved rapidly in the soft, cool breezes of her new home, and became very dear to her aunt, who was childless.

Her education had been most carefully studied, and at seventeen she had met Mr. Frank Beverley, the second son of a good old county family, whose father was an old admirer of Mrs. Cleevdon's.

Frank became passionately enamoured with the sweet winning girl from the first moment he saw her, and declared his passion, but neither his father nor Mrs. Cleevdon would consent for the marriage to take place for three years, and he was compelled to submit and work hard at Cambridge, where he distinguished himself very creditably.

At this time Mrs. Cleevdon became a widow, and Vera and she left the pretty English home for abroad, where they remained for over two years.

"Good-bye, my dear child, and may you prove as great a comfort to your husband as you have been to me," were the last words of her aunt as she gave the bride a farewell embrace, before entering the carriage.

Many were the tears that flowed, which Mrs. Cleevdon tried in vain to hide.

"What is this feeling," she thought, "that has come over me? Surely I have made no mistake? Vera loves him, but I can never forget that last cold stony look in her eyes as I bid her good-bye; but there, I am getting nervous, I suppose; I am not so young as I used to be, and all this excitement has fatigued me."

Mr. and Mrs. Beverley are sitting in the carriage as far apart as the limited space will permit; for ten minutes no word has passed between them.

The little head of the bride is slightly bowed and her long silken lashes veil her eyes, but there is a defiant gleam in them when she raises their fringe to survey her husband, which he little dreams can lurk beneath that broad clear brow.

The summer sunshine slants upon his well firm-cut mouth and chin, and the fair glistening moustache.

Both his hands are thrust, for the lack of better employment, deep down into the pockets of his light summer overcoat.

"Thank Heaven, we have arrived at the station at last," he exclaimed, impatiently, as he handed his bride out of the carriage.

At the station everything was bustle and confusion, as usual; cabs everywhere, but not one disengaged for the weary traveller, as a rule.

Luggage barrows going the unwary traveller everywhere he turns, with a "by your leave," when the hard-worked porter has, very much against "your leave," grazed your favourite corn or spine.

Happy-faced individuals, who stand with their first class ticket, just returning home to dine from their office, looking with placid satisfaction men at the poor paterfamilias who has just returned with his better half and a dozen or so of hopefuls from the seaside, and is rushing about frantically for his luggage, to hear that it was shunted off with a part of the train at Meogerton Junction.

At last they are off, and the train steams out of the station slowly and stately, carrying its burden of men and women, each bearing as best they may their hidden sorrows and griefs.

Vera sat silent pretending to read the magazine she held in her hand, but she would look covertly over it to watch her bridegroom's face, to sigh inwardly at the absence of the old love light that she had so often seen, but which seemed entirely gone now that he had made her his wife.

Many miles had passed, and the train plunges gaily on through the golden sunshine, shaking and swinging as it rushes madly on past lovely bits of rural scenery and fields of fast ripening corn, past the old farmsteads where the labourers were busy stacking the hay, as the sheep and matronly looking cows were leisurely grazing and browsing before they were housed for the night.

At length a smile of pleasure lit up his eyes, as he surveyed the scene he was being whirled so rapidly through, and he thought, "I could make myself pretty comfortable if I could only have a cigar, but of course that's out of the question with one's two hours' bride, especially as she is determined to keep a stony silence during our journey."

"How shame-faced these women are with faces and forms of angels," he still soliloquised, "what would I not give to blot out this day from my life. Heaven help me, and I love her so madly, so hopelessly; but things can't go on for ever like this, or I shall really lose my senses entirely. I must speak."

"We are nearing our destination, Vera, very shortly, and the wind is getting chilly, you had better let me put that window up," he said gently, but firmly.

"I prefer the evening breeze, thank you," she replied icily.

He rose and took a seat beside her, and before she could offer any resistance caught her round the waist, and held her firmly drawing the lovely piquant face with its ripe lips down close to this.

Her eyes were flashing with anger and wounded pride at his cruel conduct and now tardy embrace, after several hours of their wedded life; this was the first career he had tendered, and her heart is now hardened and sore against him.

She struggled to free herself from his embrace, but he held her firmer and tighter as he said,

"Vera, I cannot let you go, strike me if you will, but kiss you I will this once, my own, my darling."

Bending down he pressed his lips to hers in one long, passionate kiss.

"Release me sir," she exclaimed, angrily; "even your rights as a husband does not permit you to outrage your wife."

With a frown he let go his hold, and resumed his seat, saying,

"You need have no fear, Vera, I shall not offend again."

And so they sat, these two, strangely silent, wedded, but farther apart than even strangers.

CHAPTER II. *Two hours apart.*

VERA and her husband were located in a handsomely-furnished apartment at the "Lord Warden" Hotel, Dover; they had just finished dinner.

Vera was standing at the open window, watching the ships sailing majestically on the grand expanse of ocean, and thinking of her dear old home and the merry-making that was taking place in honour of her nuptials, and large tears gathered in her eyes, but she dashed them away impatiently.

"How handsome he is," she murmured, "but he never loved me, or he could never be so cold and heartless in his manner to me on our journey; some other girl has robbed me of his heart while I was away with aunty abroad, but he dared not confess it till to-day; I see through it all now it is too late. He has made me his wife because he was too honourable to break our engagement; and this is the beginning of that future that I have longed so ardently for, this the crowning happiness of my life; and yet there was a look in his eyes as he kissed me to-day in the train that seemed like love. Surely he could not counterfeit that tender light which came into his eyes as he pressed me to him."

A rosy blush crept over her cheeks at the remembrance.

"I wish I could speak to him now, or that he would come and kiss me," and her cheeks crimsoned with unbidden blushes at the sweet thought of possible reconciliation.

Very sweet she looked in her dark brown velvet travelling dress, with its marvel of rich lace frillings, and the little, soft jewelled hands looking so delicate as they played nervously with the bouquet which she had brought from her home.

The silence was at last broken by the entrance of coffee.

She took her place at the little tea-table at the window.

"Which will you take Frank, tea or coffee?" she asked timidly.

He started from his abstraction and said,

"Coffee, Vera, if you please."

She handed it to him, and he thought what a sweet home picture his peerless little bride made, as she sat in a low chair, with a starry cluster of white blossoms fastened at her throat, and her little hands with the bright golden circlet on her finger that had been placed there by him but a few short hours before, flashing and gleaming as they toyed gracefully with the cups and poured out the coffee from the handsome silver service.

"Vera."

She started, he spoke so suddenly.

"I wish to speak to you; will you listen to me for a few minutes?"

She bowed her head in assent, not daring to let him see or hear the joy that would have betrayed itself had she replied.

"Vera, dear, let us talk seriously, and as friends." One great throb of joy sent the blood coursing through her frame, dyeing her cheeks and lighting up her eyes with beauty.

"I have been thinking over everything, and I think it would be better for us both to be friends; for this state of things, Vera, between us is very strained and miserable, and can only render us much unhappiness. If we have made an error, a mistake, let us make the best of it. Why need we render each other wretched. We are man and wife, let there be peace between us. Do you agree with me, Vera? Do answer me," he added pleadingly, as he leant forward and took one of her little white hands in his, and imprisoned it, tenderly looking searchingly into her face for her answer.

The blood forsook her face and left it colourless as marble as she thought, "error? mistake? and this is the end of my bright dream of returning hope, this is the love he bears for his bride; Heaven give me strength to resent this cruel insult."

With anger burning on her face, she tore her hand suddenly away from his loving clasp, and rising haughtily before him, she said, scornfully, "Do not insult me by touching me; it can only make matters worse to further annoy me; as you say, we have undoubtedly made a very sad error, but I am determined that it shall be remedied, and therefore, the last we see of each other the better for both."

"Do you mean this, Vera? For Heaven's sake don't be rash, for both ourselves."

"I shall not live any longer, Mr. Beverley, I have heard enough."

In a moment more she had swept from the room with the dignity of an outraged queen.

"What infernal mischiefs have I done now?" he muttered, as he gnawed fiercely his tawny moustache. "What is to be done? Oh! the enigmas these women are," and he strode up and down the room questioning himself vainly—for no solution presented itself to his mind.

Vera hastened to her chamber, where she found her maid unpacking and arranging the numerous little elegant trifles which women think so necessary, and men all "gimscracks." Brooker was just tacking a refractory satin bow on the delicate lace-trimmed night robe when her mistress entered.

"Put everything back in the portmanteau at once, Brooker," exclaimed Vera in a cold, but firm tone. "What miss—I beg your pardon, ma'am: I should have said; but have you changed your mind then, and will cross over to France to-night?" (This in a bewildered tone).

"No, I am not going to France, I have changed my mind."

Jane Brooker thought her young mistress had certainly taken leave of her senses, especially as she spoke in a tone that, during the three years she had been her maid, was quite foreign to its abrupt sharpness and hauteur.

"What can possess Miss Vera," she murmured, "to speak to me like that, and she so gentle and kind. Well, well, I have heard say that ladies alter after marriage, but I never could think that they commenced the first day," as she folded up the blue satin dressing-gown and packed it with the dainty little slippers, and locked the dressing-case that Mrs. Clevedon had given her niece that morning away in the huge portmanteau with a sigh. Vera watched Brooker with a stony vacuity in her eyes, and saw the trunks looked as one would in a dream.

Her hands were hot and feverish, her dazed brain seemed tied tightly with whip-cord, which seemed to press the brow and cause the eyes to burn like coals of fire, as she prayed,—

"Oh! merciful Heaven! spare me my reasons! What sin have I committed that I should suffer thus?"

"I have packed everything, dear Miss Vera. Oh! pray forgive me, but you have always been Miss Vera to me, and I cannot get used to your new name somehow, ma'am, and I—"

"Always call me Miss Vera, then, it will never be any other," she exclaimed, passionately.

"Do let me call Mr. Beverley, I am sure you are not well, and quite unfit to travel to-night. He should have more thought; indeed, I don't care if you are angry with me," she continued, "I will speak my mind. I know your aunt would never forgive him if he forces you to leave here now."

"Forbear; say no more. I am not well, but I forbid you even to speak to Mr. Beverley. Come back to me in half-an-hour, I need rest."

She threw herself on the bed, which, if a cruel fate had not crushed down her love would have been heruptil couch.

Even angels could weep over the bitter woe that had come upon her young life, like Heaven's lightning from a cloudless sky.

She pressed her feverish brow on the pillow to find relief; clasped so, and she closed her weary eyes as if to shut out her grief.

But it was in her heart gnawing like a venomous thing that nothing could satisfy, nothing quell its sharp stings.

"Oh! Frank," she murmured, "come to me; let me feel your strong, loving arms about me, for, indeed, I need counsel and help to keep us from drifting apart, perhaps for ever."

She listened for his approaching footsteps so intently that she could hear the pulsations of her heart, which was beating wildly, as if to find some means of escape, some vent from its bitter anguish. But Time, that great and powerful agent which is always hurrying us on towards the shores of eternity, passed with measured tread along the world's highway, and still the love of her heart, the man she had idolized, and who had come between her and her God, even, came not, but left her, nay, deserted her without making an attempt to soothe her, or to explain away the terrible misunderstanding which had arisen between them.

"How could I lead a loveless life with him," she murmured, incoherently; "to feel that his very caress was given, not from love but duty, because he is compelled to make a pretence of outward affection to his wife. Can I bear this galling position, to live a long dreary life with a man who perhaps in his heart would wish me dead when the chains galled him too tightly? No, I will give him his freedom untrammelled with a loveless wife. 'Fate has decided we must part, and to-night. If he had one spark of love for me he would come and inquire for me; but, no, I see it all but too plainly. He is only too happy to make a barrier so that he need not even keep a semblance of affection towards me. Let me only press this thought to my poor brain!"—she clasped her forehead tightly with her hands as if to imprint it in letters of fire—"it will never me to carry out my task and live."

She rose and laved her face with water, and sat down to a writing-table somewhat calmer, and wrote the following:

"Dear Frank,—I am leaving you now for ever. I know all that is passing in your mind, and the battle you are fighting your heart; but I could not live a loveless life, so I go to-night out of your life, giving you your freedom back, and your name. Don't try to find me, for I shall be dead to you for ever.—VERA."

As she finished the letter, and was placing it in an envelope, Brooker knocked timidly at the door, and was bade to enter.

She looked perfectly frightened as she glanced at her mistress, and saw the white, set expression of agony in that once sweet face, whose usual look was that of fun, merriment, and dimpled smiles.

"Brooker, come here, I wish to speak to you," she said in a hollow tone.

"Oh! Dear Miss Vera, your looks frightened me, and I thought you were so happy. I know something awful has happened. Oh, do let me telegraph to your aunt."

"Cease, you worry me; I wish to speak to you because you will leave my service to-night."

"What have I done?" gasped the terrified woman. "If I have spoken rudely, pray for-

give me; I did not mean to offend you, indeed I did not."

"Rest assured, dear Brooker, you have not offended me, and I have nothing to forgive; but it is necessary that I should leave this place to-night—at once—and I wish you to return to my aunt, telling her I am travelling, and shall for the future dispense with the services of a maid. She is very attached to you, and will retain you in her service, for I know it was a great sacrifice on her part to let you leave her altogether."

"I cannot leave you, dear Miss Vera, and unhappy; do let me implore you not to send me away; you are in some trouble, and I, humble as I am, might comfort you a little."

"Do you think I would part with you if I did not see the necessity; do you think me heartless?"

"No, no, Miss Vera, but I think you are suffering some great wrong, and require a friend to be near you, and that your trouble has been more than you could bear, and overbalanced you like; but there, I cannot express exactly what I mean in the proper way."

"You are a dear, good creature, Brooker, and I shall never forget you or your faithfulness, but I must go from here alone."

Brooker threw herself at the feet of Vera, and exclaimed between broken sobs,

"Let me only dare speak to you this once. I see it all now; you have quarrelled with Mr. Beverley. I am many years older than you, dear Miss Vera, and now beg you for the sake of all you hold dear to see him and make it up."

"I cannot permit you even to talk to me of him; if you do not wish to offend me you will not again," her mistress replied, coldly.

"Will you not return with me to your aunt?" she continued, pleadingly.

"No, tell her with my love that I will write some day."

Vera now caught the sad broken-hearted expression on the faithful woman's face, and she felt how cruel and hard she had been to this one true friend, and folding her arm around her neck she drew the homely good-natured face to hers, and kissed it tenderly, saying,—

"Do not fear, dear Brooker; though my heart may be scared; I shall manage to live on somehow; but I am, as you say, passing through a fiery ordeal, but it is better to fight with my fate now than later on. I have youth, and health, and strength; but, oh! was any one compelled to bear as I am called upon now. I will write to you, and who knows you may yet come back to me," she added, in a soft coaxing tone, as you would when soothing a child in pain or grief.

"I will do anything that will make you happy, dear—dear mistress, and will obey you though my heart tells me not," and she wiped her eyes, and rose, feeling the warm loving womanly kisses on her brow—those kisses that from that hour made Jane Brooker Vera Beverley's slave.

CHAPTER III.

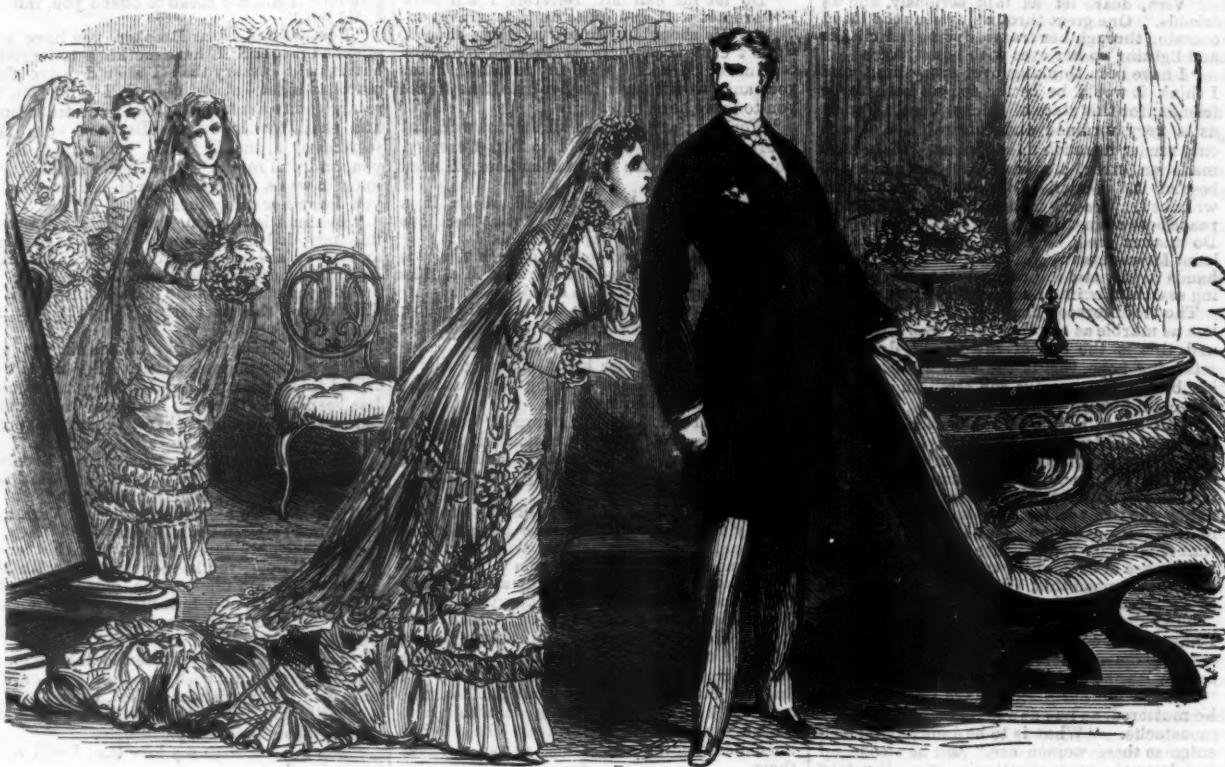
IN VAIN HE SOUGHT HER.

FRANK was awakened from his reverie by the deep clangling notes of a bell striking the hour of ten, and looking round with a start he said,—

"By Jove! time has passed rapidly, where on earth is Vera; how proud she is and unbending. I must make it up with the poor little darling, whatever her faults have been she is my wife. I will go to her room and beg her forgiveness. I am nothing but a brute to leave her alone like this."

"But there, a fellow cannot forget, and I have loved her so truly, so dearly, and looked so longingly forward to this day when she should be my very own. They may well say there's no true state of happiness in this world; and yet, somehow, I have never experienced that feeling till now that I am what they style a Benedict."

"I know what I'll do. I'll go and have a



["STOP OUR MARRIAGE!" AND VERA STOOD UP BEFORE HIM LOOKING FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE A CRUSHED LILY.]

smoke first and see the evening paper, and fortified by a little claret everything will come right, and I shall be the happiest man in the world by this time to-morrow night; these little differences always end in a warmer renewal of love."

His face beamed with pleasure as he conjured up the sweet pouting mouth of his wife being held up for a kiss of forgiveness and peace as he left the drawing-room for the smoking-room.

Half-an-hour later Frank entered their sitting room expecting to see Vera, and a shade of disappointment passed over his face, as he saw the little easy chair she had sat in vacant.

A cold wind was blowing from the sea, and the waves plashed against the boats and beach with a dull, moaning wail, like a dirge.

Frank, whistling to assume a careless manner, walked up and knocked at their bridal chamber.

But no answer was returned; he knocked again with the like result, and then turned the handle and walked boldly in.

There was a dim light in the chamber proceeding from two wax candles on a writing-table.

He took a hasty survey of the bed; but, no, his wife was not there.

An undefined feeling of some great trouble seized his heart, and he called out loudly,—

"Vera, Vera, where are you? Speak to me! Do not break my heart; cease this foolery!"

All at once a letter laying on the writing-table caught his attention, and, tearing it open with trembling fingers, he read his wife's last farewell.

As he read, his face blanched even to his lips, and he reeled and would have fallen had he not caught hold of a chair.

"My God!" he cried, as he wiped the cold perspiration from his brow, "she has left me—my darling, my wife; but I must be up and doing. I shall go mad unless I find her."

He pulled the bell violently, and said hoarsely to the chambermaid who answered summons,—

"Send my wife's maid to me at once." In a few moments Brooker stood before him with tear-stained eyes, and trembling with fear and agitation.

"Speak, woman; don't stand there dumb. Where's Mrs. Beverley?" Frank exclaimed, beside himself with mad grief.

"I cannot tell you, sir," the poor woman said, nervously.

"This is no time for trifling. I am sure you are in the confidence of your mistress. Mind, I tell you solemnly, if you withhold the truth from me now you will commit the greatest crime that woman or fiend ever conceived."

"Indeed, sir, I can tell you nothing; I only know my mistress has ordered me to return to Mrs. Cleevdon to-morrow."

"My God, woman, and you expect me to believe this! I know you are keeping something from me. Will nothing touch your heart? Do you guess what your silence may do—perhaps cause even death?"

"I cannot help it, sir; I can only say I know nothing."

"May Heaven's curse fall on you if you have deceived me!" said Frank, in a frenzied tone.

A little satin slipper lay at his feet, which had been left by Vera.

He caught it up and pressed it to his lips as if it were a living thing that could feel and reciprocate the caress, while Brooker looked on, thinking him bereft of his senses.

Looking at Brooker with eyes that gleamed with incipient madness, he said,—

"Leave me, unless you can bring my darling back to me; will money tempt you?"

"I know nothing, sir."

"Then go," he shouted, "If you had the least spark of womanly feeling about you, you would have come to me when my wife first contemplated leaving the hotel. What could her momentary anger be compared to the bitter anguish that I am suffering now? It was cruel, and nothing that you can urge can ever

exonerate you in my eyes! Go!"

When she had left he folded the slipper together, and placed it in his pocket, and then putting on his hat rushed out of the hotel, with the wind and rain beating into his face, and almost blinding him.

But there was a fiercer conflict going on within him—one that vied with any storm that ever rolled over the face of nature, leaving dire despair and destruction in its path.

When he reached the station he found the doors of communication with the platform shut, and heard the shrill scream of the whistle usually given before a train leaves.

He beat his fists wildly against the panels, thundering at them so loudly that one of the porters opened the door, saying,—

"You are too late, sir; the train is just off."

Pushing the man aside, he bounded down the steps, and reached the platform, as the train moved slowly out of the station.

Running by the side of the carriages, he peered into the compartments, calling "Vera" continuously, to the amazement of the passengers, who caught sight of his white face, and wild, gleaming eyes.

"Stand back, sir," shouted the guard, but he heeded the warning; thoroughly reckless of danger, as he still called "Vera," and clung to the handle of one of the doors.

Two porters, seeing his imminent peril, forcibly removed him, but even then he struggled to free himself, to go in chase of the train.

When the last carriage had gone, they released their hold of him; for they could perceive he had not been drinking, but was labouring under some strong excitement.

He stared into vacancy, then clutched at his collar to tear it open, to give himself air, for he was stifling, and with a hoarse cry for "Vera," fell back senseless into the arms of one of the men.

(To be continued.)



[WITH HER HANDS CLASPED THE LONELY DESERTED GIRL-WIFE REGISTERED A SOLEMN VOW.]

NOVELETTE.]

HER SOLEMN OATH.

CHAPTER I.

A CRUEL POSITION.

"I suppose I may as well go as they have asked me, but it's a dreadful nuisance."

The speaker was a singularly handsome man of eight or nine and twenty, tall and stately, with curling brown hair, eyes of an intense dark blue, and refined, clearly cut features, his was a very attractive face. No wonder that the inhabitants of Templeton welcomed Mr. West very warmly to their midst, and deemed themselves fortunate he had chosen their pretty village as his head-quarters during his sketching tour in Monmouthshire.

Mr. West was an artist, but—so it had been rumoured—by no means dependent upon his profession; this fact, joined to his good looks, had made more than one matron very hospitably inclined to him; little parties were given in his honour, excursions planned on purpose to show him the lions of the neighbourhood, and if there was a hidden meaning in all this good-will, if more than one mamma believed her daughter just suited for his wife, Kenneth never showed that he suspected it, he accepted the invitations, he made himself universally agreeable; but he was quite free from any ulterior object in lingering at Templeton. He had not the slightest intention of falling in love with any of the young ladies whose mammas were so kind to him. He had come to the village to sketch, and when he had filled his portfolio he would probably turn his back on it without a regret.

It was a lovely September day when he made the remark with which our story opens, and he was engaged to accompany the Drummonds to the ruins of an old castle some twenty miles distant. The Drummonds were among his most fervent admirers; their father

was the village doctor, but their mother was very ambitious for her girls, and had quite decided that Mr. West had been sent by Providence specially to marry one of them.

Kenneth met his hostess and her party at the railway station as had been agreed upon. The fair sex predominated greatly; the doctor's patients had been unable to spare him, but his assistant, a tall bony young man of Scotch extraction, was there to help take care of the ladies, who numbered Mrs. Drummond, her three grown-up daughters, and two small short-froked damsels, whose governess, a meek, depressed-looking girl, was in charge of them.

What a laughing and talking went on when Mr. West appeared. Mrs. Drummond welcomed him with effusion, then she dropped back that he might pair off with Sybil, her eldest hope, whose blue eyes and flaxen hair she believed to be his destiny; Mr. Sawbones, the assistant, made himself agreeable to the other ladies, and Ella Clifford tried in vain to reduce her charges to something like tranquillity.

She was about eighteen, a slight, delicate-looking girl, whose sole claim to beauty consisted in a pair of soft, expressive brown eyes. But for these she would have been hopelessly plain; as it was, in her shabby brown dress, her face pale and depressed, her whole manner timid and frightened, very few would have given her a second glance.

She was a niece of Dr. Drummond's first wife, and, consequently, neither kith nor kin to his second helpmate, who regarded her as a burden, and did not think her perpetual needlework, her never-ending duties as nursery governess and lady's companion, an equivalent for the little attic and grudgingly-bestowed board accorded her.

To Kenneth West their treatment of this girl was the greatest blot on the Drummonds' gentility, the one thing which showed their pettiness.

Nothing could have been more auspicious

than the commencement of the picnic; the weather was lovely; Mr. West devoted himself gallantly to Sybil; the ruins were thoroughly explored; they boiled their kettle gipsy fashion in the castle yard, and enjoyed their tea all the more in consequence.

Everything had gone off without a flaw, and Mr. Sawbones was industriously packing up the china and remains of the provisions, when it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Drummond that patient Cinderella was absent from her rightful duties.

Inquiries were made at once. No one seemed very positive of Miss Clifford's whereabouts until Nancy recollected she had seen her on the other side of the bridge sketching.

"Sketching indeed," said the mother, contemptuously; "why she never had a drawing lesson in her life."

Mr. Sawbones had now finished packing up, and proposed that they should start for the station, which was about half an hour's walk.

"It will never do to miss that train," he reminded them, "for it is the last to-night."

"The last!" exclaimed the artist. "Do you mean there is nothing from here after eight o'clock?"

"Nothing at all."

"What a stupid place!"

It was past seven then, the sun was sinking, and his last rays bathed the beautiful ruins in a kind of ruddy splendour. Kenneth, like a true artist, was almost lost in the loveliness of the scene, when Sybil's voice roused him.

"What is to become of that silly child, mamma? We can't leave her here all night."

"It would serve her right," said Mrs. Drummond, discontentedly; "but I suppose your father would blame us. Nancy, go and find your cousin, and tell her to come back at once."

But Miss Nancy averred she was tired, and showed every intention of screaming if compelled to do her mother's errand, and the time was passing—there was none to lose.

"If you will tell me in which direction I

shall find Miss Clifford I will go and fetch her."

Mrs. Drummond did not look best pleased, but no one else seemed disposed to go, so, planning a good scolding for Ella when she did appear, she accepted the artist's offer.

Nancy pointed out the way she had seen her cousin take, and then, as the others set out for the station, Kenneth plunged into the narrow footpath which led through the wood to the rustic bridge, a strange pity at his heart for the neglected girl he had gone to seek.

He soon found her seated on the trunk of a tree, her shabby hat had fallen to the ground, and she was sketching with almost feverish eagerness. So absorbed was she that she never heard his footsteps. He was close beside her before she saw him.

"I am engrossed to escort you to the railway station, Miss Clifford. Your aunt and the others have gone on."

He had hardly spoken, when they heard a low distant rumbling; then it grew louder and louder, nearer and nearer.

"It is thunder," cried Ella, in fright, crashing down behind the fallen tree as a vivid flash of lightning swept across the sky. Very gently Mr. West raised her.

"Nothing is more dangerous than to stand near a tree. We are going to have a storm, get behind me."

And a storm they had, terrific peals of thunder well spiced with flashes of forked lightning and showers of drenching rain.

Ella stood as a creature stunned by fright. Kenneth took one of her ice-cold hands in his, and tried to soothe her by kind encouraging words. He forgot all about the train, but even if he had remembered it how could he have taken the poor girl through such a storm. He wrapped his own mackintosh round her, and did what he could to shield her from the violence of the elements.

"It will soon be over," he said, cheerfully, "the beat of such a storm as this is, it cannot last long; see, it is lighter already."

And in less than ten minutes from then the sky had cleared, the lightning ceased, and only the drops from the trees and the rumbling of the thunder at a greater distance told of the storm that had been.

"Now," said Kenneth, "we must make the best of our way to the station; your aunt will be anxious about you."

"I hope she will not be angry."

"Angry," and Kenneth laughed. "It is not your fault, child; you could not foresee that a storm was coming on. Can you walk a little quicker, I begin to feel afraid of losing the train. Do you remember at what time it left?"

But Ella had never even heard; the least important member of the party, it was little likely she should be included in the discussions and consultations of arrangement.

A strange uneasiness had seized on Kenneth. What if they missed the train, and it really was the last from the little rustic station, in what an inconvenient predicament they would find themselves?

"Nonsense," said the young man to himself, trying to dispel his fears; "why if worst came to worst we could drive, twenty miles is nothing dreadful, and there must be some sort of conveyance to be had."

He said nothing to his companion of his doubts; if they were unfounded it would be cruel to alarm her needlessly, indeed he felt she had undergone enough already in the exposure to the storm; the little hand that rested on his arm was motionless, the small feet dragged wearily at his side; his little charge was fairly tired out.

"And no wonder," thought Kenneth, angrily, "they make her do more work than a nurse and lady's maid combined, and never give her a kind word in return. What she stays for; I can't make out; I should think it would be pleasanter to beg one's bread than have it dealt out to one after such a grudging fashion."

They had reached the station at last; whatever happened, his suspense would be over in a minute. The platform was perfectly dark, and

there was no trace of a human being about; one thing was evident, the Drummonds had gone; but still Mr. Sawbones was not infallible, there might be another train out of Harley that night.

He put his trembling charge on one of the rustic benches, and went to unearth one of the missing officials; there was a little cottage near which he took to be the station-master's, and in another moment he found himself talking to that dignitary.

"When's the next train to Templeton?"

"No more trains out of Harley to-night, sir."

Kenneth could have stamped his foot with impatience.

"I wanted to catch the eight o'clock; the rest of our party have gone on by it, I suppose?"

"It's past nine, sir," in a tone of incredulity. Railway people may pity you if you lose a train by five minutes, but when it comes to being more than an hour late their faith in and their sympathy for you vanishes like magic.

"Where's the next station? I suppose we shall have to walk on to it."

The station-master shook his head.

"There's no train on the line from here to Templeton, sir; it's only a local line for the tourists and such like."

"Can I have a carriage?"

Not such a thing in the place, sir; you might have got a cart perhaps any other time, but the few hours there are 'll be wanted for the market to-morrow; they'll have to be starting from here at five."

"But what on earth am I to do?"

"Well," said the station-master, philosophically, "I can't see what you can do, sir, but stay here all night, unless you feel inclined to walk it. You won't get any legs but your own to take you to Templeton to-night."

"How far is it?"

"A matter of twenty miles, and it's across country. I doubt if you'd find your way."

"It's impossible," cried Kenneth, half savagely, "and I have a— a young lady with me."

Then and there he registered a mental vow never to go to another picnic party, then and there he resolved never again to volunteer to escort a young lady to a railway station, but neither of these resolutions, though excellent in their way, afford him much help in the passing difficulty.

"A young lady," repeated the station-master, in a tone of great surprise, "that's awkward."

"I suppose there's an inn here?"

"Nothing for three miles."

Kenneth's despair grew greater at each word.

"What are we to do?" he asked, at last, fairly driven to confide his troubles to the station-master; "even if I could sit on the platform all night, there is the young lady."

"And you are both wet through from the storm, most likely?"

"Yes, drenched to the skin."

"Well, sir, my wife is no end of a hand at an emergency; you'd better come straight in with me and see if she can make up a bed for you."

"So that you can give the young lady a room I don't matter."

The man went back with him to the platform, carrying a lantern.

Ella was still on the seat where Kenneth had left her.

He went up and put one hand on her shoulder.

"I am afraid there is nothing before us but to spend the night here. I—Good heavens!" he broke off as the light fell on her face, "she doesn't hear me, she's fainted."

"We'd better take her right indoors, sir," said the station-master, at last roused to pity.

He took the slight burden up in his strong arms and bore her to his own door.

A pretty, bright young woman came to open it, and he explained the case briefly to her.

She threw open the door of their little sit-

ting-room where they had been at supper when disturbed by Kenneth's first summons; with many exclamations of pity, she helped her husband to put poor Ella on the couch; then, as she gently removed the girl's wet jacket, she said, cheerfully,—

"You'd better go and change your wet things too, sir. My husband can lend you a suit; they'll be dry, if nothing else. I'll see to your good lady."

It was only when argayed in the station-master's Sunday cloths that Kenneth succeeded in making Mr. Johnson understand that Ella was not his wife and not his sister, in fact, only a stranger, whom he had met three times at most.

The station-master was sensible enough to understand the awkwardness of the position.

"Poor young lady," he said, feelingly; "it's a bad plight for both of you. But you say her friends live at Templeton, then they'll know your story about the trains is true; if they doubt it, you send them here to me."

He pressed some supper on his impromptu guest, and then the two men sat down to smoke before the kitchen fire. Mrs. Johnson came in presently to say she had put the poor young lady to bed, and the parlour sofa was ready for the gentleman.

"I suppose you'll go to Templeton by the first train to-morrow, sir?"

"Yes. When is it?"

"Leaves here nine-thirty. You'll see and have a bit of breakfast ready for them, Mary, if I'm not here."

Kenneth had never in his whole life spent such a night as he passed on Mrs. Johnson's sofa.

What he should say to the Drummonds he had no idea. He knew that to an unprejudiced mind no breath of blame could attach itself to either Ella or himself; he knew that they were simply the unfortunate victims of an accident; but on the other hand, Mrs. Drummond hated her husband's hapless niece. He had seen enough of the family to know that every action of Ella's was harshly judged; hitherto they had affected to think most highly of himself, had courted and flattered him in every possible manner, but yet he could not feel sure of their reception of him the next day.

He did not see Ella until the minute before the train started.

Mrs. Johnson reported she was so tired she had better have her breakfast upstairs. Both the station-master and his wife refused to receive anything for their hospitality, and as he shook hands with them, Kenneth knew that both their thoughts were busy with what awaited him at Templeton.

Mr. Johnson put the luckless pair into the only first-class carriage on the train, and considerably locked the door. He felt some sort of discussion must take place between them, and felt it would be something if they were free from intruders.

The two began their journey in a dull, oppressive silence, only when it was about half over Kenneth moved a trifle nearer to Miss Clifford, and said, kindly,

"I fear you have had a very trying time."

"They were very kind to me. Oh! Mr. West!"—her distress finding words—"what will my uncle and aunt say?"

"They can say nothing to you, the fault, if any, is mine, and yet I cannot think I ought to have taken you through that storm."

"Do you know what I have been wishing?"

"No."

"It is very wicked, but I cannot help it. Oh! Mr. West, if only the lightning had struck me last night it would have ended all my troubles."

"Nonsense," said Kenneth, almost roughly. "What business has a child like you to wish for death? You have all your life before you. Perhaps when you are a middle-aged lady and I am a white-haired old man we may meet and laugh over our adventures."

But she was past comforting, and his light tone almost jarred upon her; she trembled so when they got out at Templeton Station that

she could hardly walk the short distance to the doctor's house.

"Would you rather I saw them first?" asked Kenneth, gently. "Would you like to wait here while I talk to your uncle?"

She murmured, "Yes," so he left her sitting in the little waiting-room, and went on alone. It seemed to him he would have given a year from his life to have been spared that meeting with the Drummonds; hitherto he had only seen the doctor's wife when she was all smiles and amiability towards him; he had a kind of instinct she would be very different now.

Even the parlour-maid seemed impressed with his enigmities, for she received him with an air of chilling dignity, and ushered him straight into the doctor's study.

He was left there alone so long that he began to think the husband and wife were having a consultation as to how he was to be received. At last they both came in together.

The interview was very short. Dr. and Mrs. Drummond absolutely refused to receive Miss Clifford back again; they coolly washed their hands of her, and at the same time politely declined the pleasure of Mr. West's society for the future.

No explanations, no entreaties, and for the poor girl's safe Kenneth descended now to these, would move them. If the doctor might have relented alone, in his wife's presence he was firm; from that day forward Miss Clifford would be a stranger to them.

"What is to become of her?" asked Kenneth, bitterly. "What do you expect a child like her to do?"

But they replied that was not their concern. She had repaid all their kindness by the blackest ingratitude, she had been the malignant enemy of her cousin Sybil (Kenneth understood they meant she had rivalled that young lady in his affections), and they wished to have nothing more to do with her.

At last he saw that it was useless, that he was only wasting time and breath. He went to his hotel, tossed his few possessions into a portmanteau, and then, hailing a fly, drove rapidly back to the station, where Ella met him with a look of mute despairing anguish.

"Are they very angry?"

How he broke it to her he never knew; perhaps her woman's instinct guessed something of the truth and so helped him. When he had finished, he said, cheerfully, —

"We are fellow-sufferers in disgrace. At least you must allow me to escort you to other relations more liberal-minded than the Drummonds."

She shook her head.

"I have no others."

"Friends then—you must have friends."

"I have not a friend in the world," and then, as though ashamed of her confession, the poor girl put her head back on the old leather sofa and wept as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER II.

KENNETH West paced up and down the little waiting-room with hasty, restless strides; he could see but one way out of the difficulty, and that he was loth to adopt, for it seemed to him that it might blight his whole life; but he came of a noble, generous race; he was the very soul of chivalrous honour. He could not leave this helpless girl to the mercy of the cold, cruel world. If one of them must be sacrificed, better that it was he. So he stopped his walk abruptly in front of her, and taking her cold hand in his, said simply, —

"My dear, there is nothing for it but for us to be married. You have no home, no friends to go to. I have no relations, and he hesitated, "to whom I could take you. We are both the victims of a cruel mistake. All I can do for you is to give you my name, and to do my best to make you happy."

The girl raised her eyes to his face. Their expression touched him; it was like the mute, imploring gaze of some helpless dumb animal.

"I do not see why I should trouble you."

"It is no trouble," he answered, gravely; "at least, it is better than the consciousness that I have made you homeless. Are you willing to trust your future in my hands?"

"Do you really wish to marry me?"

"I want you to be my wife. It is the only title that can protect you from slander."

He was the only person who had ever spoken kindly to her; he was noble, chivalrous, handsome; can you judge her harshly if she accepted his sacrifice? She put her hand in his, and committed her young life to his keeping.

She thought—Heaven help her—poor girl in her innocent unconsciousness, that after the ceremony on which he laid such stress, they would have a little home together, a home where the one study of her life would be to please him; where she would never rest until she won his love, and made him bless the day that brought them together. A friend, a defender, a companion, a protector, that was what she expected to receive through the ceremony.

Alas! his meaning was far different.

He took tickets for London, he placed her in the carriage with every care for her comfort; he bought books for her to read and provided fruit, in case she felt thirsty, but he never spoke to her.

He buried himself in a newspaper, and never addressed her until the train slowly steamed into Paddington Station.

"Are you very tired?"

It was half-past six by this time, and she had been travelling since early morning, but such is the power of excitement, she seemed to feel no fatigue, and answered that she was not in the least tired; he seemed pleased, and directed the cabman to drive to Westbourne Grove; they stopped at a large emporium for ready-made clothing, and in a few well-chosen sentences, Kenneth explained that the young lady required a complete outfit at once.

Ella was taken into some mysterious inner room, and felt almost like a lay model; so many garments were tried on; one busy assistant folded and packed as the other directed, and in half-an-hour Miss Clifford was back at her lover's (?) side in the cab, a substantial wardrobe reposing in a neat tin box on the roof of the same cab.

They drove to a small hotel near the Strand, where Mr. West interviewed the landlady, and confided poor shrinking Ella to her special care.

"Won't you stay?" pleaded the girl, wistfully, as he rose to take leave.

"It is better not. I will come and see you to-morrow morning, and explain what arrangements I have made."

Every day for nearly a week he came to see her, and took her for a drive in the almost deserted London parks, and, at last, there came a day when the drive was longer than usual, and the carriage stopped before an old village church, where a clergyman in his white surplice stood waiting for them.

A very short ceremony, barely half-an-hour, and they were back again, man and wife.

"The sacrifice is complete," mused Kenneth, bitterly. "I have paid dearly enough for a summer holiday."

"He never kissed me, he never said one loving word," thought the poor young bride, tearfully.

They went back to the hotel and dined there. When the waiter had withdrawn, Kenneth sat down opposite his wife.

"I shall be glad of a little conversation with you," he began, abruptly. "In the first place, where would you like to live?"

"I do not mind at all," she answered, blushing, "wherever you please."

"It has nothing to do with me. I am going abroad almost immediately."

A strange light broke upon her.

"Do you mean I am to live anywhere alone?"

"You are rather too young for that. I mar-

ried you that I might have a right to provide you with a home without comment or scandal."

"Shall you be gone long?"

"I do not know; that has nothing to do with it. You shall never be troubled with the vows you have taken this morning. It would be folly after such a wedding as ours to expect we could live together like other people."

"Would it?"

"Of course it would; we should end by hating each other. Now about your future. Perhaps as you are still so young, the best thing would be for you to spend two or three years at a really good school."

To his surprise she caught at the idea.

"I should like that very much. I am so stupid," flushing, "I know so little."

"There is plenty of time before you. I will find a school this afternoon and instal you in it to-morrow. Poor child," he said, in a gentler tone, "this is a strange wedding-day for you."

And it never dawned on him that her heart was yearning for a word of tenderness, that even as he spoke she was longing to throw herself into his arms and implore him to try to love her just a little.

He made his researches in a cool, business-like manner, and he found a first-rate school at Richmond, overlooking the Thames, where the number was strictly limited and select. He found himself in a new dilemma when he saw the lady principal; he could not tell her the pupil he came about was his wife. He mentioned her as a "young lady left in his care," and the schoolmistress not unnaturally concluded he was her guardian.

Kenneth went on to say he would place a sum of money in the London and County Bank on which Miss Stone could draw as she required it. He begged she would spare no expense, and that every comfort and luxury should be accorded Miss Clifford, who was to be what is termed a parlour boarder.

When he saw his wife the next day he found her sitting by the fire playing with her wedding-ring, which was too large for her girlish finger.

Very simply he told her of the arrangements he had made, and hinted gently that as he had spoken of her as Miss Clifford the ring had better not be worn.

She listened almost in silence; Kenneth thought she barely heeded his words. Presently she asked, —

"And you are going abroad?"

"To-night, probably. I have nothing to detain me after I have escorted you to Richmond."

So their parting was in Miss Stone's stiff formal drawing-room; the principal, according to custom, retired for a few minutes while the adieux were spoken, then Ella gathered all her courage, she put one hand timidly on her husband's arm, —

"Shall you write to me?"

"I think not. I shall be moving from place to place, and you in reality we are almost strangers. My letters could give you but little pleasure. I hope you will be well and happy, and make great progress in your studies."

She did not answer him; she could not. She felt like the simile in the Bible, she was crying out for bread and he was offering her a stone. Her poor starved heart yearned for one word of tenderness or affection, and he was offering her cool, friendly good wishes.

"I wonder if I shall ever see you again."

"Of course you will," he said, cheerfully. "I shall look you up when I come back. I expect I shall find you a grand young lady by that time, intensely clever, and versed in all the elegies. Good-bye, child; if anything goes wrong with you, or you want anything I can do for you, be sure and write. Miss Stone knows where letters will find me."

And with a careless handshake he was gone, and the poor child flung herself on her knees and burst into a fit of sobbing.

She had married him and he cared nothing for her—less than nothing; for all time they

two would be bound to each other, and already the tie shackled him.

With her hands clasped, her beautiful eyes raised to Heaven, the lonely deserted girl-wife registered a solemn oath—her whole life, her talents, her struggles, should be devoted to one sacred aim, winning her husband's love; until she had done that she would bear up, no matter what trials came; she would go through any suffering, bear any humiliation, so that in the end she might feel his arms round her and lay her lips to his. . . . and then she turned to see Miss Stone waiting to conduct her to the schoolroom.

CHAPTER III.

AT VERNON CASTLE.

An old country seat somewhere in the heart of Blankshire, a beautiful mansion standing in picturesque grounds, such was the ancestral home of the Vernons, a family who had received their patent of nobility from the conqueror of Agincourt, and traced their ancestors back to the Norman invasion.

The Countess sat in her boudoir on a bleak December day, talking to her only daughter, the Lady Muriel West.

"Kenneth is coming to-day!"

"Yes, what a time he has been away; it must be six months since he went off on that sketching tour, and we have heard hardly anything of him since."

Lady Vernon sighed, she loved her daughter dearly, yet her affection for Muriel was as nothing to her tenderness for her only son.

"Do you think Beatrice had anything to do with it?" she asked, almost sadly. "Bee is very bright and lovable. I always fancied Kenneth cared for her."

The door opened and a girl entered, a girl dressed in ruby satin, trimmed with soft filmy lace; she knelt down by Lady Vernon's sofa.

"Confess that I am charming, aunty."

Aunty smiled, she really could not help it.

"Is that in honour of Kenneth?"

"Certainly not, in honour of Christmas Eve, if you like. I shouldn't think of dressing for Kenneth; to begin with, it would be lost on him; he has no eye for dress, and in the second place I am seriously displeased with him."

"How has he offended you?"

"He went away for one month, and has been gone six, then he takes to gloomy letters, and you and Muriel look so dull in consequence, I expect to see you pine away before my eyes; as though that was not enough he chooses to come home on Christmas Eve, and makes dinner two hours later in consequence."

But petulantly as the beauty spoke she accorded her cousin a warm welcome, indifferent as she had professed herself; her dark eyes wandered to his face more than once during the long stately banquet. The Earl glanced at the young couple with fond affection; he loved them both, and for years it had been a recognized wish that Kenneth should espouse his beautiful cousin.

"Ken, I want you."

The young Viscount had been at home nearly a week, the settled gravity was on his brow, the strange worn look yet on his face, but Beatrice Leigh had over him a power no other creature possessed, he never thought of refusing her imperative summons.

"What is it, Bee?"

"Come and sit in the winter garden, I want to talk to you."

But when he came and they were sitting side by side, Bee's words suddenly failed her. Kenneth had to ask again—

"Promise not to be vexed, I am going to tell you a great piece of news, and it's a great secret."

"I am never vexed at anything you do. You may reply upon my discretion; wild horses shouldn't draw your secret from me when once I know what it is."

"I am going to be married."

He knew in his inmost heart the news could not affect his own future, that never could he

offer to this beautiful girl his hand; but such is human nature, he felt vexed and disappointed; then his better self triumphed, and he said—

"That is great news. May I ask whom I am to congratulate, Bee?"

"Me, to be sure."

"But who else?"

"Sir Hugh Ainslie. Oh, Ken, we have wanted you to come home so; everything has gone wrong—your father won't hear of it, and your mother never invites Hugh here; we hardly ever see each other."

"How dreadful! But what am I to do for you?"

"Pacify the authorities."

"I always fancied Ainslie cared for you, though he kept his secret well concealed."

"It was my wretched money," faltered Bee, blushing; "just as though that made any difference."

"Well, I'll speak to the pater; Ainslie's a good fellow, Bee. If you must take to yourself a husband, I don't know that you could have done better."

"And you don't mind?" entreatingly; "you always used to call me your little wife, Ken, and uncle and aunt took it up seriously; that's why they are so cross about Hugh; but that was only a joke, wasn't it, Ken?"

A great pain seized him; she was so beautiful, so winning, and from her babyhood he had been first to her—he had never pictured his life without Beatrice at his side.

Well, he agreed, since for all time a barrier reigned between them, it was well she had given her affections to another, and that other a good and true man; he would be the only one to suffer.

It seemed to him (Ken) that love and marriage went all wrong, and was part of one grand mistake.

"I will see my father this afternoon and ride over to call on Ainslie. You must have a speedy wedding, Bee, if you want my company, for I shall go abroad again early in February."

"Why?"

"I hate England!"

"You didn't used to."

"Times have changed."

"Ken, is there anything the matter? Do you know you are awfully altered; you sit sometimes for an hour together without speaking. I begin to think you must have some secret trouble."

He sighed.

"What is it, Ken?"

"You could not lighten it, Bee."

"What is it?"

"Troubles are best not spoken of."

"They are half-conquered when we confide them to other people; tell it me."

"I cannot."

"Surely you can trust me?"

Her bright face was softened to a strange sweet gravity, she put one hand tenderly on his shoulder, as his sister might have done.

"I have made a great mistake, Bee. . . . Never mention it to anyone. I have sacrificed all to a fancied code of honour, a bare chimera. I did not count the cost before, and now the sacrifice is almost more than I can bear."

No idea of his real meaning came to Bee, she understood only that he was in trouble, and she longed to comfort him.

"Things will right themselves some day."

He shook his head.

"You are much too desponding. Oh, Ken! I wish you would marry some one very, very nice. I am quite sure you would be happy then, in spite of your troubles, whatever they are."

"I shall never marry, Bee."

"You must," she cried, triumphantly. "Think of the title; you are the last of your line; if you die unmarried, the race of Vernons will be extinct."

"What a calamity!"

"It is one I shall do my best to arrest. I have a tolerable idea of your tastes, and as

soon as I am settled in town, and Hugh and I are steady enough to give parties I shall never rest until I find someone just made for you, then I shall send for you, and you couldn't be so ungrateful as not to come."

Kenneth spoke to his father that afternoon, it was as he thought, the Earl and Countess had only received Sir Hugh Ainslie coldly for their son's sake.

"It is all your fault, Kenneth," cried Lord Vernon. "You should have proposed to Bee sooner; she is one-and-twenty now, and you can't blame her if she thinks it time she had a lover."

"So she has chosen such a true one as Hugh Ainslie, I don't mind."

The Earl looked keenly at his son.

"Then you are not going to wear the wiles?"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't wish yourself in Ainslie's place?"

"I had no intention whatever of proposing to Bee. I am unfeignedly glad she has chosen such a man as Sir Hugh."

"Well, it's very odd."

"What, father, that I don't envy another man his plighted wife?"

"No; that you could live in the same house with Beatrice for years and not love her, Ken; is there anyone else?"

For an instant Kenneth hesitated, then he said, slowly—

"I have never seen a woman I preferred to my cousin. I do not hope to do so."

"I wish you would marry, Kenneth; I am getting an old man, I should like to see you settled before I die."

You will live a good many years yet, I trust, father, and I am too fond of a roving life to settle down yet awhile. I mean to go to America as soon as this business of Bee's is settled."

And he was as good as his word, for while Sir Hugh and Lady Ainslie were yet in the earliest stage of their honeymoon, Viscount West bade adieu to his parents and sister and sailed for the new world, frankly saying he had no idea how long it would be before he returned to England.

He had one rather hard battle with himself before he sailed; something told him he ought to go and see the poor young creature whom he had sworn to love and cherish till his life's end, yet who lived apart from him, not bearing his name, not wearing even his ring on her finger; but he had a horror of scenes; he argued it would only upset Ella in her new abode, and disturb her progress if he paid her a visit.

"It is ridiculous thinking of her as my wife," he said to himself. "I married her that I might provide for her, and she accepted me because she was homeless. Bee herself could not find much element for romance in such a union. Dear little Bee, when she talked of my future so hopefully, she little knew the wreck I had made of it, how through my own act and deed my home must ever be a lonely one, how I have shut myself out for all time from a wife's love and children's caresses. Oh, it was a mad thing to go masquerading to Templeton as an artist, but the crowning madness of all was persuading that poor child to marry me. It may have given her a home, but it has blighted my whole life."

CHAPTER IV.

AT A PARTY OF PLEASURE.

The London season had come and gone three times since Lady Beatrice Leigh entered the honourable state of matrimony, and she was spending the early autumn at her husband's pretty estate, Normanhurst, which was barely two miles from Vernon Castle.

September had come, but the days retained a summer warmth, and Lady Beatrice wore the prettiest of white costumes, trimmed with her favourite carnation ribbons. Opposite her on a garden chair sat her favourite friend, a

girl, who looked some years younger than herself, and whose sweet face, graceful manners and winning ways had combined to make her the darling of the season just over.

Mabel Clive was the niece and heiress of General Clive, a distinguished officer who had returned from India a year or two before. He and his adopted daughter had made a tour of Europe, and then settled down in a charming villa in Mayfair, but just now the villa was unoccupied, for the general was visiting some old friends at Bath, and Mabel had come for a long stay with the Ainslies.

Looking at her companion as she sat in the sweet September sunshine, Bee decided that she was the very girl to make Kenneth West supremely happy. She had never forgotten her cousin; she had seen very little of him since her marriage, for in the three and a half years he had barely spent a month in England. His kind old father was dead now, and the Countess had retired with Muriel to the Dower House.

Vernon Castle, swept and garnished, was ready for its mistress, only Kenneth seemed too busy travelling in Africa to think about finding a young lady to fill that post.

Miss Clive would do admirably, decided Bee. She was a slight, delicate-looking girl, with large velvety brown eyes, a clear wild rose bloom, a mass of soft silky hair, and the sweetest smile that ever tormented the heart of man.

A great many people had fallen captive to that smile in the last six months, the most eligible men of the day had proposed to the general's niece, and been declined. Mab was not cold or proud. She received all the attentions offered her with charming grace, but she never let one of her suitors see that he was more to her than the rest. No man who went away rejected could plead that he ever had any encouragement.

"Do you never mean to marry, Mab?" asked Lady Ainslie, suddenly.

"I think not," returned Miss Clive, de-murely.

"You think not! Mab, what shocking heresy. From the beauty of the day you can't want to be an old maid."

"No" and Mab played with a diamond ring on her finger, "but I am very happy as I am."

"I have a charming plan!"

"You are so fond of plans, dear," objected her friend a little. "I have known you just two years, and I am sure you have had fifty plans."

"Listen, Mab. I think it would be charming if you would marry my cousin. He is just like you, never means to marry anyone; but I am quite sure you would suit him."

"But I don't want to suit him, Bee; uncle and I are very happy as we are."

"How dull you must have been when the general was in India, Mab."

"Yes," quietly.

"I suppose you did nothing but wish for him to come back."

"I did not even know he was there."

"What do you mean?"

"Does it sound so odd? I was brought up almost entirely by some relations of my father. Uncle Clive is my mother's only brother. He met me in the street one day, and was so struck by my resemblance to his sister that he stopped me and asked my name. He took me to Paris that very night, and I have been like his own child ever since."

"Really, it sounds just like a chapter out of a novel. What a romantic story, dear!"

"You will never tell it to anyone," pleaded Mab. "Uncle wouldn't like it known, only we are such friends, Bee, I don't mind what I tell you. All the happiness of my life has come to me through my uncle; you can't wonder I am in no hurry to leave him."

"Well, if ever Kenneth comes home I shall introduce him to you, and see if he can induce you to change your mind."

"I particularly detest the name of Kenneth."

"Why? I think it is so pretty."

"It has unpleasant associations for me."

"Well, I have never known any Kenneth except my cousin, and he was always dearer to me than anyone, except Hugh. Every one thought we should be married, but we were too much brother and sister to become anything else."

"And where is this paragon?"

"In Africa just now. He is always roaming about; even before he came into the title he used to go on long sketching tours for months together. I don't suppose there is a picturesque village in England he has not visited. He used to put up at the rustic inn like any strolling painter, and call himself Mr. West."

"Why should he change his name?"

"He didn't, he only dropped his title; Viscount West would have attracted too much attention. I will show you his photograph some day; he is a handsome fellow."

"Tall or short?" Showing for her unusual interest.

"Very tall, with curly hair and dark blue eyes."

"I never trust men with blue eyes."

"Wait till you see Ken."

A servant came out then to tell her ladyship that visitors were in the drawing-room.

Mab excused herself from accompanying her hostess, and sat on in the pleasant garden. She grew tired of her solitude soon, and, crossing the grounds, she went into the park thinking to meet the shooting party returning home-wards.

Normanhurst was a very flourishing estate now, owing to its master's wealthy bride. Sir Hugh entertained his guests right royally, and people were always pleased to come, for it was the pleasantest house in the country at which to visit.

Screening her brow with one hand she looked down the broad walk, but saw nothing but a solitary pedestrian coming along amid a cloud of dust.

Mab lingered to discover who it was. She was on the best terms with every one at Normanhurst, and she decidedly preferred a companion in her walk back to the house.

She stood leaning against a tree, her pale blue dress and broad brimmed hat giving her an appearance of extreme youth, a pretty picture to any weary eye, and the new comer, although his breast was steeled against womanhood of all ages, confessed as much. He stood still at the point where the four roads diverged, not knowing which to take.

Mabel Clive saw then that it was a stranger whom she had never met at Lady Ainslie's before. One vivid crimson blush dyed her cheeks, perhaps at his assurance, as with a courtly bow he asked her to direct him to the house.

"You follow this winding path and keep to the right, then if you cross the pleasure grounds you will be at the garden entrance."

He expressed his thanks.

"Sir Hugh and Lady Ainslie are here, I believe?"

"Oh, yes, they came a month ago."

He paused, Mab paused too, then she said simply,—

"I am going back to the house. Perhaps I had better show you the way."

"Thank you; I have not been here since Sir Hugh's marriage, and I find many alterations."

"Possibly."

He tried one or two subjects but with little success. The girl barely hid her indifference. He felt piqued, he was not used to such treatment from women, who had spoilt him with their favour; there was something quite new to him in his present companion's manner. He found himself watching her very narrowly, once or twice; then she said, suddenly,—

"There's Lady Ainslie," and without another word she left him to greet his hostess, and entered the house.

"Kenneth!"

"Bee!"

There were tears in her eyes, his voice shook; they had been very near to each other, and this

was their first meeting after years. Bee soon recovered herself.

"You were the last person I expected to see. But I am delighted, and so will Hugh be. It is very good of you to come to us first."

"I have only been in England a week. My mother and Muriel are at Baden; I stopped there on my way to England."

"And you have come alone, Ken?"

"Yes," he said, gravely, "alone."

"I believe I am glad of it; for I shall at once set to work to provide you with a countess."

He shook his head.

"Nonsense, she is in the house; what did you do to her to frighten her away?"

"I never frightened anyone."

"Mab was standing at your side when first caught sight of you; then she vanished."

"Oh, was that 'Mab'?"

"Mabel Clive, my dearest friend."

"She is very pretty," absently.

"She is more than that—she is charming," said Bee, firmly; "I am quite sure you will think so."

And so the Earl of Vernon became a guest in the house of his first love.

Beatrice and her husband received him warmly; the guests—many of whom were old friends—greeted him with friendly welcome; but he had a strange sense of self-reproach as he listened to their expressions of goodwill. It seemed to him that he was acting a part—that he was deceiving one and all; he was not what they believed him, the free unfettered young nobleman, but a disappointed, saddened man, who in a moment of rashness had given his name, and bound himself for all time to a half-educated country girl, about as polished and refined, it seemed to him, as his cousin's waiting-maid.

He had heard nothing of Ella all these years.

The sum of money left at the bankers would have been ample enough for an even longer period.

He had never written to inquire whether it had been drawn upon—he had never communicated with Miss Stone as to his ward; each time he had been in England he had intended to call, but some strange disinclination held him back.

He fancied he felt his bitter mistake less at a distance; that the sight of Ella would but augment his disappointment and increase his regrets.

She was his wedded wife; he had sworn to love and cherish her, but he deemed he had fulfilled his obligations by providing Ella with a home. It never dawned on him that duty required something more.

He came to Normanhurst, meaning to stay a week; a month passed, and he still remained his cousin's guest.

The pleasant country house was more like home to him than the grand old castle which awaited its master.

He had nothing particular to hurry him away; he said to himself at the beginning of each week that he must go, but its close found him still there, a favoured and favourite guest, popular with all about him, young and old, it seemed to him, except the girl Beatrice had called her special friend, the pretty, dainty maiden he had first seen leaning against one of the stately trees, Mabel Clive.

He never quite knew what strange attraction Mabel's face held for him. For him all thought of love or marriage were fruitless. He could never now think of giving his name to any woman, and yet Bee's few chance words haunted him.

He found his eyes perpetually wandering to the graceful girl whom Bee had declared just suited to be Countess of Vernon. She never headed him—she never seemed to see that his glance followed her every movement; that his very voice changed as he addressed her.

Kenneth thought he had guarded his secret jealousy, but watchful eyes were upon him. Before he had been a fortnight at Normanhurst, Bee Ainslie was triumphing over the

success of her prediction and bets were openly exchanged in the smoking-room as to the Earl's chance of winning General Clive's niece.

They saw a great deal of each other these two whom everyone had decided would go through the world so admirably together; they were paired off on all occasions; it was Kenneth's task to take Mab into dinner, to be her partner at lawn-tennis and billiards. He never paid her a compliment, he never spoke a word to her the whole night not have heard, and yet he was madly, hopelessly in love with her, and yet he had a dull miserable certainty that when this visit was over and they two drifted apart his life could never be quite the same again, never again.

He was an English earl, the last of a long line of titled ancestry, he possessed an almost princely home, a grand house in London, and an income counted by its tens of thousands; he had health and strength, a long life probably stretched out before him, and his future was laid waste, his whole life made desolate by that one mistake of four years before.

"What are you thinking of so gloomily?"

The questioner was Mabel Clive; she came through the hall dressed in her warm driving-costume of purple velvet trimmed with silver fox, and found the Earl leaning moodily against the wall, one hand resting on his gun, for he was but just returned from shooting.

"I hardly know," returned Lord Vernon, slowly. "I believe I was thinking life was not worth much."

"What a dreadfully morbid sentiment."

"You always laugh at me," he said, reproachfully. "Miss Clive, are you quite heartless?" and then he stopped abruptly, feeling he had no right to say any more, or, indeed, as much.

"Yes," answered Mabel; "utterly and entirely; it's astonishing, Lord Vernon, how very well I get on without that encumbrance."

"Perhaps you have given it away to some lucky man," he hazarded.

"I made up my mind before I came out that I would dispense with a heart; it's quite remarkable how easy it is when you try."

"You seem to find it so."

"I am very happy," she said, lightly.

"But you might be happier," eagerly.

"Such a suggestion comes well from you after your late fit of despondency. Well, my lord, pray what method have you thought of for increasing my felicity?"

She stood close to him, the firelight falling upon her bright hair and sweet, upturned face; they were quite alone, almost everyone else had gone to dinner; her cold, repellent manner had flown, she was indescribably sweet and winning; it came to poor Kenneth like a rush of mingled joy and pain that had he only been free to ask for her love he should not have had to ask in vain.

"Well," she said, simply: "I tell you I am happy, and you assert philosophically I might be happier. I have a natural thirst for information, I want to know how."

He looked straight into her eyes.

"No one is really happy without love."

He expected some cutting rejoinder, but to his surprise none came, the beautiful eyes drooped beneath his gaze; for just an instant she stood there motionless at his side, then she sped away.

He never forgot her that evening; she looked like some fair vision of the night in her soft white drapery, a little knot of men gathered round her in the drawing-room after dinner; but Kenneth made no attempt to join them, he stood apart gloomy and in silence. Lady Ainslie came up to him in laughing reproof.

"Have you quarrelled with Mab?"

"No."

"You have quite deserted her."

He muttered something about a pack of simpletons.

"You are not very polite to my guests," said Bee, with charming good humour, "but I will forgive you since you have fallen in so entirely with my plans, Ken," putting one white hand on his shoulder; "confess the truth, you are a

hopeless victim to the little god's archery, and what is more you have taken the disease very badly indeed."

"Do you set up for an authority, Bee?"

"Perhaps. Seriously, Ken, I have something to ask you: you know you have planned a shooting party on your grounds next week; well, I want to drive over the same day, and have a sort of picnic at the castle. I was always a favourite with Mrs. Ball. I am quite sure she will pardon the irritation of six or seven hungry people if you will."

"I shall be delighted. May I cry off the shooting party to play the host, Bee?"

"Certainly not, we shall have plenty to do in looking over the house and pictures. Mab is an artist born, she will glory in the castle picture gallery."

An insane longing came over the Earl that Mab's own picture might hang there some day as Lady Vernon, but he said nothing, only promised to write to his housekeeper.

"We are all going to Vernon next Tuesday," announced Bee, coming into Mabel's room, as the maid was brushing out her long soft hair.

"What for?"

"To see the house and pictures." Then as the maid discreetly retired, Bee bent over and kissed her favourite. "It is my own old home, you know, dear, you can't think how glad I am it is to be yours."

"But it isn't, dear."

"Have you refused Kenneth?"

"Bee!" indignantly.

"Well, have you?"

"He has never given me the opportunity."

"You are the most extraordinary couple I ever heard of in my life."

"You have said as much as that before."

"Well, you have been together a whole month. Anyone can see Kenneth is head over heels in love with you."

"Is he, really?" asked Mab, quickly. "Beatrice, to be serious for once, do you think really that your cousin cares for me—like that?"

"I am certain of it; you must be blind if you can't see it. Ken is hopelessly in love—Mab, I think even you are not quite heart-whole. I have been very good to you both. I have given you dozens of opportunities; why don't you settle something?"

"Settle what?"

"Everything. I should say Ken has had time enough to make twenty proposals."

"One would be quite enough."

"Well, things must come to a crisis soon; the day at Vernon will decide matter."

"Must I really go?"

"Of course you must. What on earth would people think if you refused? Besides, it's a lovely place; I could quite understand any girl marrying Ken only to be mistress of Vernon Castle."

"I wouldn't," said Mab, simply. "To me he seems made to be loved for himself alone—a king among men if only he were not so hard and cold."

"Hard and cold!" cried Lady Ainslie, throwing up her hands, "what next? My dear, if you would give Ken one grain of encouragement you would find him anything but cold."

The day fixed for the picnic came at last, as bright an autumnal morning as the heart of sportsman or excursionist could desire. The party all assembled in the large hall; guns, keepers, dogs, all the necessities of the sport were to be found on the Earl's estate; the carriages would convey everyone to Tanglewood. There the ladies would drive on to the castle, and the gentlemen commence their sport.

"Bee, I want you."

The summons came from Lady Ainslie's lord and master. He drew her into a small study opening off the hall.

"My dear, I wish you'd entice young Houghton to join your picnic; he can't refuse if you ask him."

"Whatever for?"

"He has about as much idea of shooting as your son and heir upstairs. Here I go in mortal fear of an accident, though my keepers

are tolerably up to his stupidity. But what it will be at Tanglewood I can't make out."

Bee smiled.

"I'll do my best, but he's as obstinate as a mule; besides, he's awfully sulky just now. I sometimes fancy he has proposed to Mab and been refused."

Sir Hugh laughed.

"Whenever Miss Clive is engaged to anyone, Bee, you will lose the great occupation of your life; you are more match-making than any manoeuvring mother."

They went down the terrace steps in the highest spirits, but in the first wagonette were, of course, Lady Ainslie and Miss Clive; and it occurred to the former that her task would be like trying to convey two wild hearts peacefully in one carriage, when she saw Lord Vernon and Sir James Houghton seat themselves opposite to her. Sir James was Mab's devoted suitor; before the arrival of the Earl he had been regarded as likely to succeed, there was, therefore, bitter warfare between Kenneth and himself. The looks they exchanged were black as night, and Lady Ainslie wished regretfully she could exchange one of them for the amiable girl, or sedate elderly gentleman on the box seat, that being impracticable she resigned herself to the inevitable with as much hopefulness as she could manage.

At first it was a very silent party; Mab seemed resolved to contribute nothing to the conversation, the gentlemen did nothing but stare at her, and Bee chattered desperately on about the scenery, the weather, &c. etc., feeling, in spite of her good nature, as if she could have shaken each one of the three soundly for giving her such a tedious drive.

At last Lord Vernon roused himself to say,—

"I hope you will find everything prepared; lunch will be in the white dining-room, unless you care to come and have it with us; we shall meet at Tanglewood by two."

Now was Bee's opportunity for heeding her husband's wishes, and she seized it boldly.

"Thanks, Ken, everything is sure to be delightful. I'll see how we feel as regards our outdoor lunch; what a party of desolate women we shall be! Sir James," brightly, "you have never seen the castle, couldn't you spare a day from shooting to be our gallant squire?"

"I should be delighted," said Houghton, quickly; but the Earl was not going to leave a clear coast for his rival.

"In that case, Beatrice, I will cry off too. I can leave you in all confidence to play hostess of my home to ladies, but if I am to be honoured by a first visit from Sir James I must come home to receive him."

Blank silence, each busy with their own reflections. Sir James decided it would not be worth staying if the Earl was to be there too; the Earl savagely determined that his rival should not wander through the deserted rooms of the castle with Mabel Clive at his side; clearly if one remained both would do so, and this Mab herself resolved to put a stop to.

"I am quite sure we don't want anyone, Bee," she said, quickly. "It would never do to take Lord Vernon from the shooting party, who are as much his guests as we are."

"But I am perfectly free, Miss Clive," murmured Sir James—"free to accompany you to the world's end, if you wish it."

"I don't thank you," said Mab, brightly. "You had better be thinking of those birds' wings you promised me. Remember I am not to be put off with what you beg, borrow, or steal, they must be your own shot."

After this, of course, it was useless to try and detain Sir James; in spite of one or two attempts from Lady Ainslie he left them at Tanglewood, and the ladies drove on alone, a pleasant party of six or seven.

Bee was that happy creature, a woman free from nerves. She had done her best to second her husband's wishes, but having failed she never thought of making herself miserable because she had not succeeded.

Sir James had shot at Normanhurst every day for a week, he could surely manage this

extra sport without shooting himself or any other animal of the human species.

So Bee gave herself up to the happiness of the hour. She wandered through the deserted rooms, and pointed out their beauties to her friends; she showed Mab the picture gallery, and whispered some pretty speech about the time when her portrait would hang side by side with those of the Ladies Vernon; and then finding it was barely one o'clock it was put to the vote and unanimously agreed that they should drive to Tangley Wood, and eat their lunch out of doors in company with the gentlemen instead of in the white dining-room with only the portraits of departed Vernons for their companions.

Another hour and the party were scattered on the soft grass near the entrance to the wood, partaking cheerfully of the good things provided for them.

It was one of the merriest luncheon parties ever known, only one thing surprised people, Sir James Houghton, usually a very good friend indeed to such things as raised pie and Medoc, had not put in an appearance.

"He is hunting for my wings," put in Mab, aroably, as they rose from their impromptu repast. "Poor fellow, I never meant him to lose his lunch in getting them for me."

"Would you value them so much?" asked Lord Vernon, at her elbow.

They were standing a little apart from the others, and insensibly she moved to walk towards the wood, thus increasing the distance she answered him.

"I love all pretty things."

"That remark applies to the birds, I suppose. Houghton would hardly come under such a category." (He had red hair, watery blue eyes, and freckles.)

Mab laughed, she really could not help it, though she felt extremely indignant.

"I meant the birds."

"And you could value them for his sake?"

"Possibly, he is one of my friends."

"You have a great many friends."

"Yes, don't look so cross because I say I love pretty things. If you knew how few had blessed my childhood you would understand the intense appreciation I have for them now."

It was the first time she had ever spoken of her past life. Kenneth looked up quickly.

"I always connect you in my mind with joy and sunshine. I always supposed you had never known a sorrow."

"And yet when my uncle was in India, and I was a little lonely orphan here, many and many a time I have sobbed myself to sleep, not caring whether I ever woke or not."

"Mab!"

"It is quite true," turning an April face to him. "I don't mind thinking of it all now I am happy, but at the time it was bad enough."

"You were at school?"

"No," she said, simply, "not at school."

"What do you think of Vernon Castle?"

"It is so beautiful I wonder you can be content to leave it to servants and caretakers from one year's end to another."

"Do you think it looks homely? . . . Mab, could you have ever felt at home in it?"

His love was in his eyes as he looked at her, her own drooped as she answered,—

"No stranger could do that."

She affected to take the question to apply to her as she was then—Mabel Clive. She would not see the other hidden meaning.

"My home is widely different," she went on. "Uncle and I live in London, not merely for the season, but always. Isn't it a dreadfully unfashionable thing to do?"

"It is very comfortable. . . . And General Clive is there now?"

"Oh, no; he is at Bath; he has been there nearly six weeks. I am expecting to hear every day. He talks of coming home."

"And then?"

"And then," speaking bravely, albeit a little tremble in her voice, "then this pleasant visit must come to a close. Uncle could not do without me at home."

She had barely finished speaking when the

report of a gun fell on their ears. They could not see the shooter, but he must have been at no great distance, for they could see the smoke which followed the discharge, then the ball whizzed past, left Kenneth uninjured, but wishing from his heart it had struck him down instead of its chosen prey. Mabel Clive fell at his feet, and to his horror he saw the crimson life blood flowing from a wound in her side.

There are some moments in a man's life which stand out distantly in his memory until life itself is over; such were these.

For one instant Kenneth stood paralyzed with agony, then he raised his precious burden in his arms, and began to walk with it back to the spot where they had lunched.

As in a dream he saw the white startled faces; as in a dream he heard Sir James Houghton's bitter self-reproaches at his luckless aim.

He realized nothing clearly until Beatrice decided that Mabel must be taken back to Normanhurst; the castle might have been nearer, but medical aid would be prompter at Lady Ainslie's, and there would be better nursing and attention at her command than in Lord Vernon's splendid desolate home.

Lady Ainslie entered the wagonette, and they laid that still white form at her side, its head pillowed on her lap; not till then did she notice the agony on her cousin's face.

"If you were to ride on, Kenneth, you might get Dr. Bolton there as soon as we are."

He wanted no second bidding; he was off, spurring the fleetest horse to be found in the castle stables.

Meanwhile, the others did their best to console Sir James, whose grief and remorse were almost beyond expression; he must have sunk into helpless emotion but for the wise suggestion of Sir Hugh Ainslie.

"Look here, Houghton, however matters go with that poor girl, ours will be a dull house for weeks to come; many of our guests, most in fact, were due in your house later on; if they were to go back with you to-night do you think it would give your mother a panic? I don't want to be inhospitable, but I know Normanhurst will be a dreary place for days to come."

The suggestion was caught at; the ladies resigned themselves to leave all their packing to their maids; the gentlemen decided their men were to be trusted.

One or two would gladly have stayed at Normanhurst and shared the Ainslies' anxiety, but after all Mab was not as dear to them as to Sir Hugh and Lady Ainslie, so they were easily persuaded to agree.

When Lord Vernon, after hours of hard riding, got back, he found a clear house, and Hugh Ainslie waiting in the hall to conduct the doctor to the door of the room, where his wife had already installed herself as chief nurse.

CHAPTER V.

A BRAVE RESOLVE.

LORD VERNON never quite knew how long he waited in the library while the doctor was upstairs with his patient; minutes and hours seemed to him to have trebled in their length since the moment when his darling was stricken down in the pride of her youth and beauty.

"I am so happy now," she had said, poor child, little knowing of the danger approaching.

Kenneth could hardly have told what he most hoped or feared. If he had ever doubted the state of his own heart, to-day's accident had taught him to doubt no longer.

For him the world held but one woman, and that was Mabel Clive; 'twixt him and her a great gulf yawned.

Would it not be easier to lose her now, to see her go down alone into the valley of the shadow of Death than to watch her recovery, and then in after years be compelled to witness her marriage with another man?

The minutes went on, and still the Earl paced up and down with hurried uneasy strides. Did he think of another September day four years before, when he had paced a far different room with just such strides?

Hardly; he had no thoughts now to give to his folly of long ago—he had no thought, no fear, no hope, save for Mabel.

Sir Hugh came in presently, calm and grave, yet with a sadness on his face which told he was not indifferent to the fair girl whom his wife loved as a sister.

"You had better come and take some dinner, Kenneth; you are doing yourself no good here."

He had known Kenneth all his life. He could never quite forget how Ken had smoothed matters for him and Bee with the old Earl; but he had generally regarded his wife's cousin as a calm, easy-going man of no extreme feeling. He saw his mistake now.

The Earl looked as if he had been ill for weeks; the thick veins stood out like cords upon his forehead, his eyes were bloodshot, and his hands trembled like an old man's.

"Indeed you had better come," persuaded Sir Hugh.

"I cannot. Leave me, Ainslie, I am no fit company for anyone to-night."

A sound fell on their ears like the opening of a door. Kenneth looked up eagerly.

"It is only one of the servants. The doctor won't be leaving yet."

"He has been here two hours."

"Which shows he thinks there is hope. Doctors do not waste two hours over a hopeless case."

"Did he really say there was hope?"

"He has not said anything yet. I am waiting to hear his report before I telegraph to the general. Poor old man! it will half kill him if things go badly with Mab; she was the apple of his eye."

"Small wonder!"

"And you mean to rob him of her; well, Ken, I have guessed as much for some time now."

Kenneth said nothing, he only directed his eyes to the door.

"Someone is coming."

It was Lady Ainslie.

"There is hope yet," she said in her calm tone, which seemed to carry a portion of her own deep thankfulness in its every sound. "She has opened her eyes, and spoken once."

"Thank God!" said Kenneth solemnly, and then the husband and wife went away together, feeling that gladness such as his needed no witness.

But in spite of that first hopeful verdict, the anxiety was by no means over, Mab's state was so precarious that for days no fresh face was allowed in the room.

General Egerton was peremptorily forsworn by the doctors to come to his niece; they would not even let him stay at Normanhurst for fear his presence in the house might become known to her, and prove an exciting object; some injury to the head had been sustained in the fall, and Dr. Bolton and the physician summoned from Blankton feared that brain fever would intervene.

And it did.

There came a time when the light of reason died out of those beautiful eyes; when the soft hair was cut quite short, because Mab complained that her head was so hot, and when nurses and devoted friends kept their anxious watch by her bed, expecting each hour to be her last.

The doctor told Lady Ainslie that some heavy anxiety or perplexity must have troubled her for months; the injury to her head had only developed the mischief already there, some secret care must have disturbed Miss Clive's peace for a long time. The wound in the side was healing fast, if they could but conquer the cruel fever which was sapping her young life, all might yet be well.

Bee was perplexed. What trouble could have worried Mab, the brightest happiest nature she

had ever met? Could she have cared for Lord Vernon more than she suspected, and have sorrowed over his tardiness as a lover?

Lady Ainslie began to think so, when in the raving of delirium Mab would call on Kenneth to come to her, would plead with him not to be angry with her, not to look so stern; she could not go to sleep while he looked like that, and she was tired, oh, so very tired; she must rest soon, she wanted rest so much.

Lady Ainslie listened till she could bear it no longer; then she went in search of Kenneth.

She found him in the library; he was generally to be found there now, waiting for news of Mab.

She went up to him and took his hand.

"Ken, we have been friends a long time, we are just like brother and sister, you would speak to me as easily as to Muriel!"

"More so."

"Then answer me one question. But for this accident should you have proposed to Mabel Clive. . . . I will tell you my reason for asking you afterwards, you will forgive me then?"

"I forgive you now. . . . I love Mabel as my own life, Beatrice; Heaven knows I would give life itself to make her happy."

"I think that less than that would make her happy. Kenneth, she loves you; she is distracting herself by some fancy you are angry with her. I know I am proposing the most unheard-of thing, but in a case of life and death one forgets conventionalities: I want you to come with me to Mab's room."

"To say farewell," and the strong man's voice shook; "is it as bad as that?"

"To say nothing of the kind, to tell her your happiness depends upon her, and she must get well for your sake."

"I cannot!"

"Don't you understand it may be the crisis in her illness; she has taken up this miserable fancy, and it is destroying all chance of her recovery. Ken, you must come."

He buried his face in his hands.

"If only she had never seen my face! If only I had died before I came here!"

"Kenneth!" said Bee, fairly frightened, "you are terrifying me, what do you mean?"

"Have you never guessed my secret?"

"Never."

"Did you not wonder, seeing how I worshipped Mabel, guessing how I loved her, did it never strike you as odd I did not ask her to be my wife?"

"Often, I thought you were afraid of risking all, and so you waited."

"I waited. Oh! Beatrice, I have no right to speak of love or marriage to any woman. I was married more than four years ago!"

"Kenneth!"

Indignation, pity, grief, dismay, were all intermingled in that one word.

"How could you do it, how could you deceive me so! You knew I meant Mab to love you. Oh, Kenneth, how could you do it!—you have wrecked her life."

And Beatrice burst into a fit of bitter weeping.

By-and-by when she grew calmer, Kenneth poured out his miserable story, he kept back nothing, he made no attempt to defend himself.

"You began well," said Bee, simply; "you sacrificed yourself nobly for that poor girl; up to your wedding-day I see nothing to blame; but oh, Kenneth, your whole life since has been one mistake. There was no one in the world to blame you, you had doting parents who thought all you did perfection. How could you hide your secret from them, and so cruelly desert your wife!"

"I was not cruel to her, Bee, I found her as I thought a happy home."

"Happy!" repeated Bee, scornfully. "If she had a particle of pride the life you chose for her must have been torture; if you resolved on leaving her you ought to have acknowledged your wedding, and confided her to your mother's care in your absence."

"She was a half educated country girl, she had no idea beyond a little village."

"You married her, and it was your duty to care for her; she might have become a sweet gentle wife, you might have had a happy home. Look at what you have done, you are miserable yourself, your poor wife must be doubly so, and you have blighted my darling's life."

Late some evenings after, as Sir Hugh and Kenneth sat over the library fire, the baronet said, simply,—

"Beatrice wanted me to tell you that Miss Clive is so much better; we hope she will be able to come downstairs next week."

Kenneth guessed Bee had told her husband all.

"And you want me gone; I understand, Ainslie, I will pack up to-morrow. I can never thank you enough for all your hospitality. I can never forget these weeks."

"I hope we shall see you here again," said Hugh. "Mabel will be leaving us in another fortnight, any time after that Bee will be pleased to welcome you—and your wife. It must come sooner or later," he continued.

"I am sure your own sense of right will tell you so, you cannot leave the Countess of Vernon at school like a half grown child, Kenneth; I fear you won't like my saying so, but there is nothing for you but to make the best of your bargain."

"And Mab?" ventured the Earl.

"Mab will be true to herself; it cannot bring you any nearer to her that you neglect the woman you have sworn to love and cherish."

A long, long silence, the two men puffing away slowly at their Havannas. Said the Earl putting out his hand,—

"I believe you are right, Ainslie. I shall leave your house to-morrow to go and find my wife. My home can never be what some men's homes are—what yours is—but I will do my best for the poor girl I've married."

"And in that you'll find happiness."

He shook his head.

"I think happiness and I have parted company. One word, Ainslie: will you get your wife to explain matters to Mab—to Miss Clive? Don't let her think I played with her, let her know how I suffered."

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"Mab is too pure and innocent for the thought a married man has stooped to love her to cause her less pain than to believe she has been the plaything of a flirt. Bee and I are both resolved that as far as our power lies, she shall never hear your name again. We are loth to hurt you, Kenneth, but we must think of Mab; whenever she is not with us we can have no more welcome guest than you, only I would give much that I hold dear to undo the work of the last two months, and give back to Mab the innocence and hope which you robbed her of."

The next morning the Earl left Normanhurst.

CHAPTER VI.

WORTH STRUGGLING FOR.

LORD VERNON left Normanhurst with a sad heart, and yet a strange peace which had not been his for four long years. There was no longer need for him to ponder over his future course, to wage a bitter conflict between duty and inclination. He had confessed his marriage to the two people he most esteemed, and they in their turn would reveal the secret to the girl he madly loved. Henceforward Mabel Clive would be nothing to him but a memory and a name. He must strive to forget her and to do his duty to the neglected child the law called his wife; that very day he would go to Richmond, before he slept that night he would see Ella.

"After all, poor girl, she has been hardly done by," he thought, remorsefully; "we have both something to regret. Well, she is young still, only twenty-two, it will not be too late to try and do my duty to her."

He was kept so long waiting in the drawing-

room that he became positively alarmed, and when Miss Stone came in there was little reassuring in her face.

"Can I see Miss Clifford?"

The schoolmistress stared.

"I trust there is no mistake. I wrote to you more than three years ago to relate the sad circumstances that had occurred, the letter was sent to your bankers to be forwarded to you."

"I do not understand," said Kenneth, hoarsely. "Is she dead?"

"Better if she were!"

"Pray explain yourself, madam."

"I cannot make my story a pleasant one, Mr. West: Miss Clifford left my roof one day very suspicious circumstances; she went out and she never returned!"

"Was she discontented or unhappy?"

"I do not know that she was unhappy, she never expressed any discontent; she was the most diligent and painstaking pupil I ever had, and though I never show partiality, I may add my favourite. Apart from the unpleasantness of the affair, her loss caused me personal grief, for I was warmly attached to her."

"More than three years ago?"

"Yes. I have wondered very much that you left my letter unanswered."

"I never had it, madam!"

He could gain nothing more from Miss Stone, so he went down to the bank: the manager was perfectly polite, he remembered forwarding despatches to a Mr. West in America, but a mail steamer foundered very soon after that date, and it was probable the one which carried Miss Stone's letter.

Kenneth stood as one dumbfounded. What could have become of his poor neglected child-wife? How had she left Miss Stone's?

She had not a friend in the world, she was utterly alone; a sharp pang of remorse smote him; he seemed to hear her voice again, asking him to write to her.

She must have found the routine of school life unendurable and run away.

But this conclusion did not satisfy him; Ella had been at Richmond nearly twelve months when she disappeared, she would have grown used to Miss Stone's restraints and regulations in that time.

Lord Vernon went up to London, and though the short winter's day was closing in, he drove to the office of a firm skilled in all sorts of delicate investigation.

To the head of this firm, Mr. Thorpe, a sharp, clear-headed lawyer, he unfolded his story, and then waited in silence for the verdict.

"And you say the young lady had no relations?"

"Only some distant ones, who had positively refused to hold any more communication with her."

But Mr. Thorpe deemed it well to take down

Mr. Drummond's address.

"Blood's thicker than water, my lord; I should be inclined to think the young lady has gone back to her friends. I don't think you need feel uneasy about her."

"You don't understand," said the Earl, simply. "She is my wife, Countess of Vernon. I tell you, Mr. Thorpe, she must be found, if I spend half my fortune in the search. Think of my position. I cannot tell whether I am a married man or a widower!"

"Your wife. That alters the case; my opinion is very different now."

"You think—?"

"I think some accident befall her ladyship, and she is dead; no girl in the world whose only chance of rank and wealth was a reconciliation with her husband would hold herself purposely aloof for three years."

Lord Vernon gained very little by his interview; he went away with a strange remorse gnawing at his heart; it seemed to him that if any evil had befallen his wife, if in a moment of despair or unhappiness she had taken her own life, her blood was as surely on his head as though he had killed her.

He went down to Templeton himself and interviewed Mrs. Drummond, who was far too

great a time-server to refuse to see an Earl. When she learned that her little neglected drudge was in very truth Countess of Vernon, she exclaimed with such astonishment that Kenneth knew her surprise was genuine.

"I have never seen her since you took her away," said Mrs. Drummond, promptly, "never once. Dear, dear, to think of Ella being a countess! It almost takes one's breath away. She may well have money to throw away."

Kenneth caught at that, it was evident Mrs. Drummond had had some communication with her late nursery governess.

"It is only little Una," replied the doctor's wife, "my youngest child, a cripple, you know. Ella spoilt her completely, till Una would hardly speak to anyone else. Well, each birthday since the child went away a hand-some present has come for Una, and we have guessed of course Ella sent it, only as there was no address we could not write in reply."

At Kenneth's earnest wish Una was sent for; a child of twelve with a sweet patient face, but a hopeless cripple; he had never seen her during the month he spent at the village inn. Una was not considered ornamental or engaging by her mother, who kept her in the background.

She came holding the presents, the four tokens of affection which had come to remind her of her lost friend: a book of fairy stories, a doll dressed in all the extravagance of Paris fashion, a box of German toys, and a paint-box.

"And you are sure these came from your cousin?" Kenneth asked her, kindly.

"Oh, yes. I could not forget Ella's writing; she was at Richmond when she sent the book."

Proof positive.

"I fancy she was a great traveller," put in Mrs. Drummond; "the doll came by railway with ever so many foreign labels on the box, and the same by the toys; the paint-box was sent through the post; London, I think the mark was."

Two facts were clear to Kenneth: his wife had been living so short a time ago as May, and she had been possessed of ample means; the gifts were selected without any regard to economy, the doll in particular must have cost pounds. He rose to go, puzzled and distressed. Ella had asserted she had no relations in the world, no friend on earth; how then did she manage to live in luxury and send presents of such a costly nature?

He went back to London and resumed his search; he grew weary and heartsick over his investigations, and in the midst of them he received little note from General Clive, begging for his company at dinner on a certain day.

It cost him something to refuse the invitation, but he did refuse it, pleading a prior engagement; then a few days after he met the General in the Park and the old officer would take no denial, he insisted upon the Earl accompanying him home.

"Mab will be delighted to see you; we have never forgotten your kindness the day of her accident. What an idiot young Houghton must be!"

It was a comfort to be able to assent.

"Actually wanted my consent to his marrying Mab," pursued the General, who was the simplest, most communicative old gentleman. "I told him people didn't shoot young ladies first and marry them afterwards."

"And Miss Clive?"

"Mab didn't care. I wish, to tell you the truth, she would care about something; the doctors say there's nothing the matter with her, she's only to get strong, but it seems to me that's just what she can't do; she lays on the sofa like the ghost of herself. You come in to dinner, a little society will be good for her."

Kenneth had his own doubts of that, but the temptation was too strong for him, and excuses about his morning coat having been re-

moved, he accompanied the General to the pretty bijou villa in Mayfair.

After all Mab did not come down to dinner; a message came that she was tired, so the General and his guest partook of it *tête-à-tête*, and as soon as it was over an old Indian friend turned up to play cribbage; clearly Kenneth's company could be dispensed with.

"But you'll go up and see Mab," cried her uncle, seeing the Earl bent on leaving. "Poor child, a little society will cheer her up."

The old Anglo-Indian saw nothing peculiar in inviting a fascinating Earl to spend half-an-hour alone with a beautiful girl; to his idea there was a great gulf between Mab and Lord Vernon, a gulf of years, I mean; he never suspected the real gulf between them.

Kenneth yielded; he went upstairs to the drawing-room door and a faint voice said, "Come in."

He forgot everything when he was beside her but herself. Two months had passed since he bore her an unconscious burden in his arms, and she looked the mere shadow of her former self; her soft hair was cut quite short, and clustered in curls all over her small head, her hands were almost transparent, and her cheeks were very pale in spite of her becoming pink dress.

"Mabel!"

She opened her eyes and fixed them on his face with a strangely happy smile.

"You have stayed away from me a long while," she whispered, half reproachfully.

Kenneth started, could it be that his dreadful secret was yet unknown to her, he almost feared so from her manner.

"I did not stay away willingly."

"I wanted you so," pleaded the girl, pitifully; in the worst of my illness, when they thought I was dying, I wanted Beatrice to let you come and say good-bye to me, but she would not... Did you have my letter?"

"I never had a letter from you in my life, Mab. Do you think I would have left it unanswered?"

"I gave it to Bee, she promised she would send it."

In his heart Kenneth knew why his cousin had suppressed it, but he could not say so to Mabel.

"I gave it her the day after we left Normanhurst, and I have been expecting you ever since. Oh, Kenneth, the days were so long and weary, when each one passed without bringing you."

His task was getting harder and harder, but he made an effort.

"I have wronged you cruelly, Mab. I ought never to have come from Normanhurst. I ought not to be here now."

"Why not?"

"Because—oh, my darling, why do you make me say it—because long ago I gave up my right of loving you. I put another in the place I want for you."

"No," and the girl's voice was firm and clear, "that was what I wanted you to know, Kenneth; I could not tell it to you, it was so hard to say, and so I wrote it... I am your wife."

"My wife!"

The neglected girl, the foolish child you married. Oh, Ken, I was more foolish than you knew of, for I loved you even then, when you left me at Richmond. I took a solemn oath that my life's aim should be to win your love."

"Mab!"

"Have I won it?"

"I can hardly realize anything, I only know that you are dearer to me than all the world."

"I was playing for high stakes," said Mab, with a trace of her old archness, "but fortune favoured me and I have won."

"But how did you leave Richmond?"

"I met my uncle one day, it was in summer, and I sat on one of the benches in the park; he was struck by my resemblance to his sister and asked me my name. I told him, and he said I was his niece. I told him a little of my life, all of it in fact but our marriage, and he asked me to leave Richmond and be his child; he thought there'd be a difficulty with

Miss Stone, so I went then, just as I was. I wondered if you would spare a regret for me when you heard of my loss."

"I never heard of it till a month ago."

"Well, I went abroad. I saw everything worth seeing in France and Germany, and I came home to go through a London season."

"And broke half-a-dozen hearts meanwhile. Mab, how could you keep true to me through it all?"

"I don't know," she whispered, shyly; "I always longed for your return. I fancied if I only met you under another name, as a stranger, my scheme must succeed. Do you know, Kenneth, I never thought of failure; I believe I did not dare."

"And Bee?"

"Bee knew nothing; I was afraid to tell her. Kenneth, tell me one thing, have I succeeded, are you sorry we missed the train that night long ago?"

"My darling, I am sorry for nothing that gave you to me, but I shall never quite forgive myself for all those years of neglect and unkindness."

Her bright head rested on his shoulder as though it had found her true home at last; Kenneth took his first kisses from his wife's lips, and wondered with an intense thankfulness at his happiness.

"And when are you coming to Vernon?"

She shook her head.

"Don't you know, young lady," he said, lightly, "you promised four years ago to have a very particular regard for my wishes; well, this is a very important wish, I want my wife."

"I don't feel as if I was really that at all. Kenneth, don't you think we could be married over again, and have a wedding-cake and a honeymoon, like other people?"

"The wedding-cake and the honeymoon by all means, my darling, but I'm afraid we can't be married again."

Of course the general had to be told, and very perplexed and troubled he looked as he listened.

"I always meant Mab to be married at St. George's in white satin and pearls," he observed, complainingly. "I've brought pearls from India fit for a queen."

The pearls and the white satin, like the wedding-cake, might be enjoyed in the future, but this much was certain, they could never grace the bridal of Elena Mabel, Countess of Vernon.

It was publicly announced that Miss Clive would go abroad in December, for the benefit of her health, and before she had been gone a fortnight the news came over the sea that she had married the Earl of Vernon. To this day Kenneth and Mab rarely allude to their wedding day, and very few people know that it dates from four years previous to their honeymoon. All speculations as to the suddenness of the match, all surprise at its secrecy, had been forgotten when the Earl and Countess returned in May to take up their abode at Vernon Castle, there to continue through all the years of their wedded life that firm affection and friendship for the master and mistress of Normanhurst which existed during that memorable visit when Mab fought so hard for the prize she still declares was worth struggling for, and which, after long waiting, she won at last.

[THE END.]

A SAGACIOUS CANARY is described by the *Live Stock Journal*. The bird, which belongs to a Nova Scotian damsel, one day found the water in its glass too low to reach, and after several unsuccessful attempts to drink, hopped on its perch, and sat quietly for a few minutes. Suddenly it turned round, pulled a loose feather out of its tail, and dipped the tip into the water, putting its claw crosswise on the feather, and wetting its beak in the moisture. The canary repeated the trick several times, till its thirst was quenched.

FACETIES.

JONES says that he used to be proficient in half-a-dozen languages, but that since marriage he is not even master of his own tongue.

A LAWYER proosed to a client to undertake a case on the following terms: "If I lose," said he, "I get nothing. If I win, you get nothing."

"Your honour and gentlemen of the jury, I acknowledge the reference of counsel of the other side to my grey hair. My hair is grey and it will continue to be grey as long as I live. The hair of that gentleman is black, and will continue to be black as long as he dyes."

His KNEW.—At a Sunday-school a teacher asked a little boy if he knew what the expression "sowing tares" meant.—"Course I do," said he, pointing to his little breeches, "There's a tear mother sowed. I teared it sliding down hill."

The LAST FOLLY.—A volatile young earl, whose conquests in the female world were numberless, at last married. "Now, my lord," said the countess, "I hope you'll mend." "Madam," said he, "you may depend on it, this is my last folly."

EPIGRAPH from a tombstone in the cemetery of Montmartre:—"Here lies Joseph X., who for twenty years after the death of his wife lived in the society of his mother-in-law, and died in the hope of a better world beyond."

"I DON'T miss my church as much as you suppose," said a lady to her minister, who had called upon her during her illness, "for I make Betsy sit at the window as soon as the bells begin to chime, and tell me who are going to church, and whether they have got on anything new."

Go Up, Sir.—At a recent school examination, the question was asked, In what way did Queen Elizabeth show her wisdom? when one of the boys replied, "The people wanted her to get married, and she refused." Upon being further asked why she refused, the boy replied, "Because she wanted the whole power herself."

A FRENCH photographer boasts of having been able to catch the impression of a flying bird. There is nothing at all wonderful about that. A man, who has no scientific attainments whatever, without any efforts on his part, caught the impression of a flying bat. It was a very clear impression. The flying bat was a brick-bat. He was offering a resolution at a ward meeting when the accident occurred.

A short time before the union the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons was in London, accompanied by an Irish lad, a son of a tenant, in the character of under footman. His master who lodged at the bottom of Norfolk-street, sent him one day to call a hackney coach. He appeared in a few minutes with the carriage, having taken one of the horses by the reins and led it to the door. The Speaker naturally expressed his surprise at the absence of the coachman; to which the lad simply replied, "The devil a world did yer honer say to me about a coachman, ye only told me to bring a coach; and sure I found an ocean of them at the top of the street."

Some few weeks back a worthy lady advertised for a plain cook, and several persons applied for the situation. Owing to her fastidiousness, however, none of them seemed to suit her requirements; but at the "eleventh hour," a maiden from the Emerald Isle made application. In reply to a question whether she was able to do plain cooking, she gave an affirmative answer, adding, "The plainer the better for me." After being further tested, in an oral manner, the good lady said, "My husband likes his meat boiled, and I like mine roasted. Now, if you had a fowl to cook, how would you do?" "Please, ma'am," said the girl, "I wud roast it forst, an' you could ate your share; then I wud boil what you left for master."

QUICKSILVER.—The nimble sixpence.
A SHIP THAT HAS TWO MATES AND NO CAPTAIN.—Courtship.

A POLITICAL ORATOR, speaking of a certain general whom he admired, said he was always on the field of battle where the bullets were the thickest. "Where was that?" "In the ammunition wagon."

The following was written by one undergraduate to another:—"Mr. T. presents his compliments to Mr. H. and I have got a hat that is not his; and if he has got a hat that is not yours they must be the ones."

Two prisoners were lately acquitted of a theft. The magistrate told them not to come there again, or they might not be so fortunate. One of the prisoners said, "No, your worship, we'll not come again; we should not have come now if we had not been brought."

"How do you like the young ladies you have just met?" sweetly gushed the young lady. "Do they look better or worse than you expected?" His answer caused a change of topic. "I'm not taking any for better or worse, if my feelings are not deceived," was the gruff reply.

"You had better change that rug," said a lady to her servant. "Don't you think it corroborates better with the carpet in this way?" was the response. It was the same girl who told her mistress that "a gentleman with a predicament in his speech had called to see her."

A MAN in Prague has invented a Sterhessoren-tentenstielkasten. We have often wondered why some genius didn't invent one of those things. It will fill a long felt want and make the inventor rich, if he is not hurt by the first man who attempts to pronounce the name of his contrivance.

"And you say that you are innocent of the charge of stealing a rooster from Mr. Jones?" asked an American Judge of a sleek-looking prisoner. "Yes, sir, I am innocent as innocent as a child." "You are confident that you did not steal the rooster from Mr. Jones?" "Yes, sir; and I can prove it." "How can you prove it?" "I can prove that I didn't steal Mr. Jones's rooster, Judge, because I stole two hens from Mr. Graston the same night, and Jones lives five miles from Graston's." "The proof is conclusive," said the judge. "Discharge the prisoner."

On the first day of a recent session, as the terms are called in Scotland, the students at the Edinburgh University read on the door of the Greek classroom—"Professor Blackie will meet his classes on the 4th inst." A wag took out his pencil, erased the "c," and made the notice read thus—"Professor Blackie will meet his classes on the 4th." A group of young men hung about the door on the opening day to see how the professor would take the joke. Up he came, saw at once the change in his notice, stopped, took out his pencil, apparently made some further alteration, and passed into the room with a broad grin on his face. A roar of laughter followed him. As altered for the second time, the notice ran—"Professor Blackie will meet his asses on the 4th."

Such DEVOTED BETTER HALVES!—There is a certain duel, it is reported, now pending abroad which began several years ago. Mr. A., a bachelor, challenged Mr. B., a married man with one child, who replied that the conditions were not equal, that he must necessarily put more at risk with his life than the other, and he declined. A year afterwards he received a challenge from Mr. A., who stated that he too had now a wife and child, and he supposed therefore the objection of Mr. B. was no longer valid. Mr. B. replied that he now had two children; consequently the inequality still subsisted. The next year Mr. A. renewed his challenge, having now two children also; but his adversary had three. The matter, when last heard of, was still going on, the numbers being six to seven, and the challenge yearly renewed.

MOTTO FOR THE MARRIED.—Never dispair.

A YOUNG LAWYER, appointed to defend a prisoner dressed in sailor's costume, addressed the jury very pathetically in behalf of "this child of the sad sea waves, this nursing of the storm." At the close of his remarks it was discovered that his client was a cook on a canal-boat, and had formerly peddled fish. "The child of the sad sea waves" was committed for six months.

"WHAT next, I wonder?" involuntarily exclaimed a small man while reading an account of the comet, as he sat in a barber's shop awaiting his turn to be shaved. "You're next, sir," suddenly shouted the tenorist artist, in such a stentorian voice that the little man keeled heels over head out of his chair, and thought for the moment that the tail of the comet had given him a belt alongside the ear.

An architect enters a hardware store to buy a yard measure. The storekeeper shows him the different kinds, in wood, in brass, &c., and mentions the price of each. "You ask too much," says the architect. "I am sure that I can find them cheaper at the hardware store opposite." "Perhaps," replied the shopkeeper; "but I wish you to remember that the yard measures we sell are much longer than those you will find opposite."

"I DON'T SEE," observed a young miss of sweet seventeen and a half Springs, as she stood before the mirror last Sunday morning, toning up the colour in her cheeks and making other preparations to listen to a sermon on "All is vanity." "I don't see why a Quaker lady should ever have a desire to go to church." "Why, what do you mean, Clara?" asked her fashionable mother, as she inserted a diamond pin in some fluffy lace stuff around her neck. "Why, you know, ma, that a Quaker woman wears the plainest kind of clothes, and her style of bonnet doesn't change once a year."

THOUGHTFUL.—Very.—"Do you think, Mary, you could leave father and mother, this peasant home, with all its ease and comforts, and emigrate with a young fellow who has but little besides his strong right hand to depend upon, and with him search out a new home, which it should be your joint duty to beautify and shape, delightful and happy like this?" Dropping her head softly on his shoulder, she whispered, "I think I could, Archie." "Well," said he, "there's Tom Jones, who's going to Australia, and wants to get a wife. I'll mention it to him."

It is related that, about a year ago, a facetious young man sent out his wedding invitations worded thus: "Come and see me capture my mother-in-law at eight o'clock sharp." A few days since a friend met the rash youth in the street, and in the course of conversation mentioned the unique card. "Don't say a word about it," said he. "I've regretted it ever since—that card." "You don't mean—" "I mean just this. Did you ever hear of the fellow who caught a Tartar? Well, that's me, only I caught three." "You astonish me," said the friend. "You said three?" "Yes. Mother-in-law, wife, and baby." Perhaps some of our married friends understand this. We don't.

Some QUEER THINGS.—Take, for example, the following genuine notice on an Irish church door:—"This is to give notice that my person is to be buried in this churchyard but those living in the parish. Those who wish to be buried are desired to apply to me, Ephraim Grubb, parish clerk." Here is another kindred specimen:—"Notice—The churchwardens will hold their quarterly meetings once in six weeks, instead of half-yearly, as formerly." In the April of 1806 the following bill was stuck up:—"This house to be let for ever, or longer if required." Such a house would quite match the gown mentioned by Edgeworth—"which would wear for ever, and might be converted into a petticoat afterward." Another peculiar garment is described in one of Lady Morgan's earliest novels as being composed of "an apparent tissue of woven air."

SOCIETY.

SIR BEAUCHAMP SEYMOUR is said to be engaged to a widow possessed of considerable personal attractions.

A MARRIAGE is just arranged between Lady Georgina Spencer Churchill, fifth daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, and Viscount Cottenham, eldest son of Earl and Countess Howe.

THE KING OF DENMARK has gone to Grannunden to be present at the christening of his grandchild, the infant daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland.

THE GRAND DUCHESS VALERIE, youngest daughter of the Emperor and Empress of Austria, is about to publish in the Hungarian language a drama founded on a novel written by herself.

The Queen has expressed a desire to see the Laureate's new prose play. As there would be some inconvenience in removing the play to Windsor after its first public performance, it is understood that arrangements are being made to enable the Queen to see the drama before its production.

The members of the Royal Naval Club of 1765 celebrated the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar, October 21, 1805, and the battle of Camperdown, October 11, 1797, with the usual dinner at Willis's Rooms, King-street, St. James's, on October 25. Vice-Admiral William G. Luard, C.B., was president, and the guest was General Suther, C.B., R.M.L.I.

A NUMBER of officers who had taken part in the memorable conflict at Balaklava celebrated on the 28th of October the anniversary by the customary dinner at Willis's Rooms, King-street, St. James's. General Sir Edward C. Hodge, K.C.B., presided, supported by General the Earl of Lucan, G.C.B., General Sir Thomas M. Mahon, Bart., C.B., Lieut.-General Forrest, C.B., Lieut.-General Shute, C.B., Lieut.-General Sir C. P. Beauchamp Walker, K.C.B., &c.

A BRILLIANT and fashionable wedding was that of Lord George Nevill, third son of the Marquis of Abergavenny, and Miss Temple Soames, which took place at Tunbridge Wells, the ceremony being performed by the Bishop of Sodor and Man. The bride's dress was of great magnificence, and was composed of the richest white Genoa velvet, over a petticoat of satin duchesse, draped with old point de Flandres, the train and paniers being trimmed with ostrich feathers. The eight bridesmaids wore Directoire coats of *feuille morte* velvet, over-skirts of pale blue satin, velvet hats to match their coats, with blue feathers. A very young page, son of Lord H. Nevill, who bore the bride's train, was dressed in a Reubens costume of ruby velvet.

The marriage of the Very Rev. Dr. Bickersteth, Dean of Lichfield, with Miss Mary Wynde-Browne, daughter of the late J. Whitmore Wynde-Browne, Esq., of The Woodlands, near Bridgnorth, took place at Christ Church, Cheltenham, on the 12th of October. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Canon Fenn, vicar of Christ Church. The wedding party assembled at the church at eleven o'clock, the bridegroom being attended by R. Bickersteth, Esq., son of the Bishop of Ripon, as best man. The bride entered the church leaning on the arm of her brother, Captain Wynde-Brown, who gave her away. She wore a dress and train of pale fawn-coloured silk, bonnet to correspond, trimmed with feathers, and carried a bouquet of choice white flowers. The bridesmaid was attired in a dress of crimson velvet, and white felt hat, trimmed with crimson feathers. After the ceremony the wedding party left the church to the strains of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and proceeded to the residence of the bride, where they shortly after partook of breakfast. The pathway leading from the church was strown with flowers.

STATISTICS.

LITERARY PEOPLE.—An industrious statistician has found out that out of 139,143 persons of both sexes engaged in literary work of various descriptions, only twelve became lunatics. It is doubtful if any other profession can make an equally favourable showing.

The Wreck Register for 1880-81 just issued shows that the number of wrecks and collisions on the coast of the United Kingdom during that period was 3,575, being 1,056 in excess of those of the previous twelve months, and resulting in the loss of 984 lives. Of these wrecks only 705 cases were total losses, and there was loss of life from only 288, or about 1 in 18 of the vessels lost or damaged. The localities of the wrecks, excluding collisions, were as follows:—East coasts of England and Scotland, 1,088; South coast, 503; West coasts of England and Scotland and the coast of Ireland, 987; North coast of Scotland, 82; and other parts, 202; total, 2,862. The number of collisions during the year was 713, of which 63 were between steamships; 148 between steam and sailing vessels; and 72 between steamships under way and steam or sailing vessels at anchor. The National Lifeboat Institution reports that during the past 27 years there have been 55,416 wrecks around our coast, involving a loss of 19,534 lives, the lifeboats of that institution saving 12,667 lives during the same period.

GEMS.

Horn is the brightest star in the firmament of youth.

Faith and hope cure more diseases than medicine.

The pleasure of doing good is the only one that never wears out.

The reward of doing one duty is the power to perform another.

Home discovers all faults; religion should bless it with abundance of charity. Home is the place for impressions, for instruction and culture; there should religion open her treasures of wisdom and pronounce her heavenly benediction.

ASPIR.—If you aspire to the highest and the best, you may not be able to attain the summit, but you will come much nearer to it than if, in the first instance, clipping the wings of what is really pure, noble, unselfish ambition, you determine to sacrifice and surrender all claim to the highest and the best, and rest content with some commonplace attainment.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

VERMICELLI PUDDING.—One tablespoonful of vermicelli, four eggs, one pint of milk, sugar, lemon-peel and nutmeg. Steam one hour.

LADY'S CAKE.—One-half cup of butter, and a half cup of sugar, two of flour, nearly one of sweet milk, half a teaspoonful of soda, one of cream of tartar, the whites of four eggs well beaten; flavour with peach or almond.

FORCE-MEAT BALLS.—Mince boiled veal or chicken very fine, add nearly the same quantity of salt pork scraped very fine and about as much bread; season with sweet herbs, cloves, allspice, pepper, mace and nutmeg; mix it well with eggs, and make into balls; fry in butter.

CALF'S LIVER.—Cut a calf's liver into slices, and put them in a frying-pan with a little butter and parsley; add a spoonful of flour mixed with a little broth, a spoonful of vinegar, or half a glass of wine, pepper, salt and pieces; cook ten minutes, and serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A BALL-room car is the latest novelty across the Atlantic, and has been introduced on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul line. A merry excursion was recently made by a party from St. Louis, who danced vigorously with the train moving at the speed of forty miles an hour. The ball-room was a large luggage car sixty feet long by fifteen wide, the floor was well carpeted, the walls beautifully painted and hung with pictures, and decorated with bunting, evergreens, and garlands of roses. An orchestra accompanied the dancers, and refreshments were handed round every hour.

A WORD ABOUT BABY.—Even in furnishing baby's wardrobe you might as well study economy. In buying his first cloak you will find it better to make it into a sack with a cape. If you use a baby carriage the long part of the cloak is quite in the way, and baby is always covered with an afghan. If you ride with it on your lap it is better to cover it with another shawl. It can wear a sack until at least two years old, and then it can be used to line another. The prettiest caps are the ones home made. First, make a cap to fit the head of silk or silesia, put a cord around the face to draw it down close to the face, cover with any of the pretty lace in vogue put on plain, a frill of wide lace around the face, and a few little bows. Those bought at the milliner's have entirely too much on them. Or pretty ones can be crocheted, with ribbons run in to suit the taste. Don't over-dress baby; for no one thinks of his clothes if he himself is sweet and clean.

EGYPTIAN HABITS.—The ordinary inhabitant of the towns passes his life in a simple and uniform manner. Before sunrise he leaves his couch, performs the morning ablutions enjoined by his religion, and repeats his early prayer. To say his morning prayer after sunrise is forbidden by the ordinances of his religion, and to allow the sun to rise over one's slumbering head is regarded as prejudicial to health. He then drinks his cup of coffee, and smokes his pipe either at home or in the public coffee-house. His breakfast which he takes after the coffee, or sometimes before it, consists of the remains of his meal of the previous evening, or of cakes and milk, or for a trifle he procures from the market the ever ready national dish of ful, that is, stewed beans. He then engages in his avocations, buys, sells, writes, works, or moves about, all in the most comfortable, quiet, and deliberate manner. "What is not done to-day must be done to-morrow" in Arabic; "to-morrow, if God please," stands written on his forehead in large letters. There is really nothing for which the Egyptian mechanics can be said to be famous. The things in which they used to excel are rapidly being forgotten. The fine masonry of the older mosques would be thrown away on the architectural tastes of the present day, and hence the race of skilful masons is becoming extinct. The coloured glass which used to be made in great perfection for windows and lamps is the product of a forgotten art, and most of the glass and china used in Egypt—even the national coffee-cups—are imported from Europe. The same fate has come to the turners who used to make beautiful lattice-window-screens; people now prefer glass, and lattices being no longer required, turners are forgetting how to make them. The potters do a good trade in unglazed porous vessels for cooling water, and the palm furnishes occupation to many hands. Egypt is no longer famous for fine linen; even its cotton and woollen stuffs are coarse, and its silk of poor quality. The tanners, however, have not forgotten their art in curing morocco leather, and the love of ornament, extending beyond slippers, supports goldsmiths in all the small towns.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CURNO.—Of course the young lady is right, as is usual in disputes between her sex and the opposite one. Two *teaspoonfuls* would mean two separate teaspoons each full. *Teaspoonful* is an English word, and its plural is *teaspoonfuls*.

T. M. J.—Ants can generally be banished from a pantry by strewing the shelves with a small quantity of cloves, which should be renewed occasionally, as after a time they lose their strength, and consequently their efficacy.

S. P.—It would be difficult, and perhaps impossible, for you to make out a legal claim for damage against the railway company. No man can very well prove to the satisfaction of a court and jury that he would have been successful in a business operation which he did not have a chance to undertake.

ANY.—There is not much luck in finding a horse shoe, unless a man finds a good one just at a time when he needs it. There is sometimes "bad luck" in losing a horse shoe, even if it is a poor one. You say that some of your friends laugh at you. We can hardly blame them.

LAURA D.—The engagement seems to have been so much a matter of business on your side, and seems to be now so much a matter of indifference on the gentleman's side, that the amount of harm done to either of you by breaking it off cannot be very great. We should judge from your statement that the gentleman is quite as ready to give up the engagement as you are.

ELINA.—The term penny, when used to mark the size of nails, is supposed to be a conception of pound. Thus a fourpenny nail was such that a thousand of them weighed ten pounds. Originally the "hundred," when applied to nails, was 120. Another version of the origin of the term goes that nails were at one time sold by the 100, and the term fourpenny, sixpenny, tenpenny, referred to such nails as were sold at fourpence, sixpence, tenpence per 100.

DENNA.—To make fine red sealing wax, melt four ounces of very pale shellac in a bright copper pan over a clear charcoal fire at the lowest degree of heat that will be necessary to melt it. When melted stir in one and a half ounces of Venice turpentine (previously warmed), followed by three ounces of vermillion. For the purpose of melting the shellac more easily some add a little alcohol.

SINCERITY.—As the pay is small you are quite right in making any evening engagement that can be even indirectly to your advantage. What need you care about what others say? So long as they do not contribute to your support, consider your own interests before theirs. As to the case mentioned, there is no impropriety in calling your relative's attention to it, leaving the responsibility wholly with him.

ORLANDO.—You attach too much importance to trifles, and perhaps exaggerate the amount of attention your wife bestows on her fellow-worshipper. If you see no other fault in your wife's conduct, you should only notice this one in the most good-humoured way possible, and base your complaint on the impropriety of attending to anything but the service while in church, rather than on any undue interest taken by your wife in a man not her husband.

O. D.—It is unnecessary for you to ask the man who has been calling on you, and making love to you, whether he has ceased to love you; he never can have loved you in any true sense of the word. An honourable man does not tell a girl of seventeen that he loves her dearly, unless his feelings towards her are so pure and deep that he wishes to make her his wife. As far as can be judged from your letter, the less you have to do with the man of whom you write the better it will be for your happiness.

ELIDA J.—It is said that the Mother Shipton prophecy was first published in 1488, but as this report cannot be authenticated it is more usual to say that it was published in 1641, it being certain that it appeared then. Of course it has never come true, and it is absurd to believe that it ever will. The most noted of the German poets were Goethe, Von Schlegel, Uhland, Von Spec, Kerner, Heine, Weckherlin, Lessing, Hans Sachs, Rückert, Opitz, Schiller, and Herder. The first telegraph wire in America was laid between Baltimore and New York in 1844.

S. Y. M.—A gentleman has no right "to try to entirely monopolize" any one lady's society at a party or social entertainment of any kind. No matter if he is engaged to her, he should leave her free to talk with and receive some attention from other gentlemen. And though he may be so in love with her as to "faire only her company" he should be gentleman enough to control his feelings and make himself agreeable to others of the party, and to show other ladies some attention. In good society a married gentleman is not expected to dance with his wife more than once in the evening, and must not take her down to supper.

HISTORICUS.—The great French historian, Thiers, says the reason was that in war Napoleon was governed by his genius, and in politics by his passions. When he set out on a campaign he did not allow his personal feelings to interfere with his operations. He then acted from cold intellectual perception, and selected his subordinate commanders solely with a view to their ability and fidelity; but in political affairs he allowed his personal feelings to govern him, and would appoint men to office who were neither able nor faithful. He would also do things in a rage which would sometimes so complicate his diplomatic relations with other governments as to render the mischief irreparable.

S. T. R.—The letter is well written, and the facts stated clearly and grammatically. The only error we find is in the sentence quoted from the letter of the party who criticises your grammar. You should not allow his criticism to annoy you, as he is evidently one of those narrow-minded snobs whose censure is more to be desired than their praise.

BESSIE L.—Tell the young lady exactly what your circumstances and prospects are, and if she really loves you enough to share them with you, marry her as soon as you conveniently can. If you and she are really worth much, you will always love each other the better for having struggled and borne a little together, and in a country like this no energetic, capable man is ever held back in the race of life by having a good loving and sensible wife.

R. S. O. A.—It is no longer stylish to wear ornaments of any kind in the hair. Ribbons and flowers are entirely out of date in the way of hair-dressing, and only a few matrons still cling to tiny feathered or jewelled pompons. Ladies wearing mourning for a parent use the veil over the face for one month only. It is still worn after that, but thrown back. Both ladies and gentlemen use black-edged stationery as long as they were mourning.

W. J. B.—There is no domestic animal whose nervous system is as well developed as the dog's. Its brain is seldom in repose, and it is strongly influenced by the power of imagination. Nearly all sicknesses common to dogs are excited by nervous sensibility, and they are frequently delirious just previous to their death. As a dog is so nervous and excitable a creature he should be treated with the same gentleness, kindness, and firmness that you would use towards a nervous, excitable child.

LOVE-DRAMA.

Along the pillow's crimson front
Her midnight tresses loosely lie,
And curling lashes softly hide
The tender darkness of her eye.

Ah, who can gaze without a thrill
Upon such loveliness as this?
Her taper fingers, white and still,
One long to clasp and lightly kiss.

Her lips are parted in a smile
That half reveals the dimple rare,
Which comes and goes, as dreams trip on,
Upon the cheek so softly fair.

One slipped foot peeps from the folds
Of silken draperies, rich in hue,
And over all the south wind sighs
A happy song for ever new.

Tis dreams of love that bring that smile
Upon those lips of perfect mould;
An eager voice, a murmured vow,
And tender secrets all untold.

T. E. D.

LILA.—You should get letters of recommendation from the schools in which you taught, and by means of such letters make yourself known to the school board of the place in which you are living. If there are any schools under the care of the religious denomination to which you belong, lay your case, with your letters of recommendation, before the clergyman of that denomination. Even if there are no such schools, any clergyman to whom you may apply will give disinterested advice, and whatever assistance is possible to you in your effort to find a place suitable for you.

CORA.—There is no objection to the marriage of first cousins, provided both are sound in mind and body. Of course, if there is any hereditary taint in the family, such as tendency to consumption, a marriage between cousins is undesirable. A person having lungs slightly weak, but not actually diseased, may escape consumption by proper care, and if married to a partner perfectly sound in that respect, may become the parent of a healthy family. But if two people, both having a slight tendency to the same disease, marry, they are likely to entail that weakness, in a greater degree, upon their unhappy offspring.

M. J.—Promenade costumes should have the skirt short enough to *clear the instep*, and they should be of the same length all around. It is not intended that short dresses should touch the ground at all or ever be raised with the hand. 2. As very few long dresses are worn we would not advise you to have any train dresses made. 3. Bernhardt gloves are no longer fashionable; the Mousquetaires, which fit tightly at the wrist and are only loose above, have entirely taken their place. 4. It is not considered stylish to wear earrings that match the jewellery worn at the neck. 5. "Moonlight blue" is one of the palest possible shades of blue and may be beautifully combined with pale pink or the blackish red seen in the very darkest carnation pinks.

LADY JANE.—We would not advise you to receive gifts from a gentleman to whom you are not engaged nor to carry on correspondences with "several" gentlemen. Your only gentlemen correspondents should be relatives or an acknowledged lover. You may at any time invite a gentleman to call upon you who is known to your parents and of whom they approve. It is best to extend such an invitation when the gentleman has just shown you some little attention, and no man of sense would regard such an invitation as "making advances to him." A lady has a right to extend courtesies and hospitalities to an unmarried gentleman without incurring unpleasant remark. If such remark is made it is a gross impertinence.

BESS.—1. The demand by the young lady for the return of her letters was equivalent to a dismissal of her lover, but whether she had good reason for doing so she can better decide herself. If she thinks now that she acted hastily, and wishes to renew the intimacy, she may call in the aid of a mutual friend to bring it about. 2. If there were accommodations in the house, we see no reason why her mother should object to his remaining over night with the family as a guest. If they had not, she could not have done otherwise than she did. 3. The conduct of the father should not lessen the gentleman's esteem for the lady. She cannot be held responsible for his habits, and should have the sympathy of her friends in her mortification.

L. N. Y.—To make cream cakes, for the crust take three-quarters of a pound of flour, half a pound of butter, one pint of water, and ten eggs. Roll the water and butter together; stir in the flour while they are bolling, and then let it cool. When cold, add the eggs well beaten. To make the custard, use one pint of milk, four eggs, two cups of sugar, and half a cup of flour. Roll the milk, and while it is bolling add the sugar, eggs, and flour, and flavour it with lemon. Drop the crust on tins, and bake them in a quick oven ten or fifteen minutes. When they are done open them at the sides and put in as much custard as possible. It improves the appearance of the crust to rub it over with the white of an egg before it is baked.

FRED W.—You and the young lady did wrong in entering into an engagement which was to be kept secret from the young lady's parents; and she did wrong subsequently in deceiving and misleading her mother. What would you think of two people who had acted as you and this young lady have acted, with reference to anything else than an engagement to marry? Suppose you had formed a plan to embark in some doubtful and risky enterprise with some young man; suppose you and he had kept the master from his parents; suppose that his father had found out about the scheme, and that you and he arranged to deceive and mislead that father, who had only his son's good at heart; supposing all this, what answer could you give to the question, "Did we do right?" and why should an entirely different standard of right and wrong be applied to an engagement?

S. W. R.—1. A davenport is a kind of table or desk which has drawers below, shelves for books above, and a sloping top for writing. 2. A cosy is a bell-shaped woolen covering or hood, which is placed over a teapot to help it retain the heat. These are often made in the shape of a cocked hat. They are thickly padded, and the outside is of cashmere, silk, or satin handsomely embroidered or trimmed with gilt braid. 3. A marquise bauble is a long, tight-fitting jacket, untrimmed save for handsome buttons. It should be made with great neatness and should fit to perfection. Indeed, unless a lady has a very fine figure the coat will scarcely have its full elegant effect. It takes four yards of velvet to make a marquise coat; but as one may be worn with any silk skirt, they are a valuable addition to the toilet.

ELENA.—The cultivation of the grape and the making of wine are of the most remote antiquity, as appears from the Scriptural history of Noah, and from many passages of the most ancient authors. The earliest accounts known of the manner of cultivating the vine are by the Roman authors, Virgil and Columella. The vine was probably introduced into the south of France as early as into Italy. It is said to have been brought to Marseilles by the Phoenicians about 600 B.C., and its cultivation was coextensive with the early civilisation of all the countries along the Mediterranean. Its introduction into the south of Germany occurred in the third century B.C. The first vineyards on the Rhine and Moselle were planted by the Emperor Probus, 281 A.D. The Huns, who remained in a number of settlements on the Rhine, after the expedition of Attila into Gaul, 451 A.D., brought thither the arts of cultivating the grape and of making wine from Pannonia; and Hunnish grapes and wines were much sought after at that time. The monks, during the middle ages, were the first to plant vineyards and to make wine in many parts of Europe. The Romans introduced the culture of the grape in England, and at the time of the Norman conquest there seems to have been vineyards in the south and south-west of the above-named country which disappeared afterwards, although in some places to this day the vine is cultivated more, however, for the fruit than for wine-making. In Greece and the Ionian Islands raisins form the chief part of the produce of the vineyard. The Spanish and Portuguese introduced vine culture into the Azores, Canary Islands, Madeira, and America. In 1650 the Dutch carried the first vines to the Cape of Good Hope.

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